

K • \$1.50 • July, 1981 • UK:75P

Combined with Fantastic ©

AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES



Cover
painting by
Vincent DiFate



Roger Zelazny • Barry N. Malzberg
Ron Goulart • Robert Silverberg
Richard Lupoff • Robert Adams
David R. Bunch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in this issue

PEOPLE KEEP urging us to take a chance, get away from predictable stories — be experimental. Barry Malzberg suggests in this issue's guest editorial that it may already be too late for taking risks in the field of science fiction.

Since we are not (yet) in the big leagues of *sf* magazine publishing economically speaking, we must dare to grab the attention of the discriminating *sf* reader, hungry for something new. In fact, we broke out of the mold some time ago. We think our readers will appreciate some mental jogging along with their entertainment — some brain-bending rut scuttlers in the mix. Even our straighter offerings are strong on ideas, full of impact. Boring we will strive to never be.

Witness some off-the-beaten-track entries in this issue. Most notable is Roger Zelazny's "The Naked Matador," written in a clipped style not seen from this inventive writer before, interpreting a classical theme with a hauntingly powerful mood. Rick Park's "The Passing" is about witchcraft and demons — or is it? "Ova Hamlet" spins a truly "Gorry" parody. "The Nosepickers of Dawr," irresistibly different. Funny, too. And then we have Ron Montana's "Butter Lady" — someone you won't meet every day, praise the powers. A seductive variety-pack of offbeats; take your pick.

Our longer piece this month is a new Robert Adams "Horseclans" tale, sure to please his many fans. The uninitiated may think the title suggests warriors and swords, but what this writer delivers is way more than action-packed adventure. Adams loves animals, understands men and explores the relationship between them in a

way that offers poignant counterpoint to violence. An exquisite story.

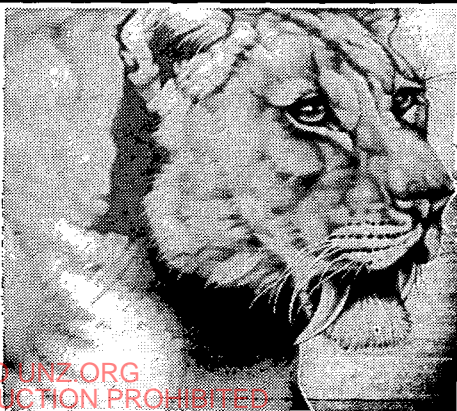
Rounding out the fiction, we present *Hall of Famer* Ron Goulart's timeless, time-travel detective story, "Plumrose," with a delightful new introduction by the famous author; Darrell Schweitzer's "Raving Lunacy", or how it was to be a nut in days of yore; James Patrick Kelly's "Last Contact", another superb chiller about children; Wayne Wightman's "At the Center of the Universe", an entertaining examination of the ultimately enigmatic; plus some short-shorts for added spice.

Our columnists continue to inform, comment and entertain in high style on various subjects — *sf* personalities, filmdom, scientific futures, books, etc., and "Opinion" every issue from Robert Silverberg.

Since this is first a magazine of short stories and articles, we mention artwork last, but never least. Design and art enhance the package, make people pick it up and buy it, move the mind through the pages and often bring to life a character, event or essence of a story. They may sometimes take a back seat on a conscious level, as ambience, but subliminally they reign supreme. In this issue we feature the following gifted illustrators: Gary Freeman, Alicia Austin, Steve Fabian and on our cover the masterful Vincent DiFate.

The cover painting is from *DiFate's Catalog of Science Fiction Hardware*, by Vincent DiFate and Ian Summers, from Workman Publishing, New York. See our review of this splendid book on page 13. Ian Summers has done it again!

Arthur Bernhard, Publisher • Alan Bernhard, Associate Publisher • Elinor Mavor, Editor & Art Director • Britton Bloom, Anna Gail, Editorial Assistants • Gary Freeman, Staff Illustrator • W.L. Thomsen, Circulation Manager



COMBINED WITH FANTASTIC ©

AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES



July, 1981

FOUNDED IN 1926 BY HUGO GERNSBACK

Features

The Amazing Hall of Fame • 54
Ron Goulart

Amazing Interview/Bob Shaw • 14
Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot

Is Speculative Fiction
Afraid to Gamble Anymore? • 4
Barry N. Malzberg

Articles

Opinion • 6
Robert Silverberg

The Man Who Loved Mars • 127
Dave Stover

Impossible Numbers • 130
Steve Aaronson

Fiction

The Hunter:
A Tale of the Horseclans • 26
Robert Adams

The Naked Matador • 47
Roger Zelazny

Namesake • 67
Elizabeth Morton

The Nosepickers of Dawr • 68
Ova Hamlet

Timestopper • 78
Ken Doggett

Last Contact • 81
James Patrick Kelly

The Passing • 86
Rick Parks

The Butter Lady • 96
Ron Montana

Raving Lunacy • 100
Darrell Schweitzer

No Smoking • 113
Robert H. Brown

At the Center of the Universe • 114
Wayne Wightman

Random Thoughts

Roger Zelazny • 52
Scott E. Green • 85
Joey Froelich • 95
David R. Bunch • 112

Departments

Intercom (Letters) • 22

Book Reviews • 8
Tom Staicar

Cover

Copyright © Vincent DiFate 1980. Reprinted with permission of Workman Publishing Company from DiFate's Catalog of Science Fiction Hardware by Vincent DiFate and Ian Summers.

ISSN 0164-7687

© AMAZING Vol. 28, No. 1, July, 1981 is published bi-monthly by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., Lincoln Ave., Purchase, N.Y. 10577. Editorial Office: P.O. Box 642, Scottsdale, Ariz. 85252. \$1.50 a copy. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and other mail items are to be sent to P.O. Box 642, Scottsdale, Ariz. 85252. Second Class Postage paid at Purchase, N.Y. 10577, and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1981 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Typography by Words & Pix. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts. All mail addressed to editor assumed available for publication unless otherwise requested. Not responsible for mss received without proper return postage.

Is the most speculative form of literature afraid to gamble anymore . . . ?

L'ETAT C'EST MOI

In mid-1969, as the recently appointed and juvenescent (29 is not an age as the poet should have pointed out; it is a condition) editor of the *Bulletin*, the semi-monthly publication of the then four-year-old Science Fiction Writers of America, I wrote and published an editorial mildly critical of NASA's public relations and of the Moon project itself. It was written in reminiscence of the 12/68 Frank Bormann captained mission in which the Moon was circled and Genesis was liberally quoted (it was Apollo X, I believe, but I am too lazy to look it up) and the use of Genesis seemed to me a profound failure of separation of church and state as well as a forced and forcing response to a voyage which struck me as overwhelmingly significant, mystical and private. I said all of this in a rather halting fashion (I did not then have a handle on the personal essay and for all I know still do not), kept it to a decent four hundred words and devoted the remainder of the issue, as always, to market reports, contract summaries, and letters between and amongst SFWA members, most of whom did not like one another.

Cries of pain, loathing and rage descended upon premises at 216 West 78th Street where the innocent publication and innocent remarks had been assembled. They descended also upon the then SFWA President and shortly thereafter the officers and trustees, having duly conferred, decided that my services were more urgently needed elsewhere . . . as a full time writer of my distinguished fiction that was to say. That is, the officers did not wish the editorship of the *Bulletin* to interfere with my burgeoning career and I was sent on my way from that volunteer position with regard and haste. (I thought at the time that to be fired as a volunteer was some kind of low but learned as the years ground on that science fiction offered humiliations even more intricate and absolute.)

Why? the young gent with the fresh credentials (novelette in *Analog*, short story in *Amazing* and that neat short-short in the new *F&SF* at the back of the room asks. Well, sir, like most members of the SFWA I was barely born let alone reading when you were out there making history you old fool and although this is pretty distant it's kind of interesting. Why did they can you for what you call a few mildly anti-NASA, anti-Bormann remarks? NASA's just a public-relations front now and Bormann's the airline president, right? Everybody knows that that Moon stuff didn't play: you were speaking for the majority. Unless those remarks weren't so mild. You always did underestimate your effect on people, Malzberg.

Ah, maybe I did son. Point conceded. Nonetheless let me answer in my own way: it is perhaps elliptical but in the end all will come clear as the widow should have said to the bishop. The letter-writers (they wrote letters with the implication that if they had been closer they would have been more direct) seemed to think of the field of science fiction as a kind of Research & Development arm of a technology administered by the government . . . that the field, in short, was not so much an arena of exploration or debate (as we sixties persons were being encouraged by, say, Michael Moorcock or Harlan Ellison to think) but was indeed Gernsback's Flowering . . . it existed to popularize technological advance, to dazzle the unsophisticated public with visions of the machinery and the miracles ahead. That was what Gernsback wanted. all right (with the secondary ambition

of interesting young men in science as a career and however Hugo may have failed in that aim we now know him to have been completely successful).

Of course, respects to Harlan, respects to Michael, I had taken a different view and I thought that at the time I spoke for a lot of readers and writers who felt the same way. The evolution of the field literarily and stylistically through the thirties and forties, the introduction (almost from the beginning of the Campbell years) of a strong dystopian element in speculation which Horace Gold seized upon and brought to the center of the field, had led me to feel in 1969 that it was late in the day indeed and that science fiction had a more important role to play in the culture than to serve as a cheerleader for technological advance and the constant increase in government monies allotted to NASA (which was the public relations arm of the scientific establishment). I feel more than a decade later that I was right — that my attitude was one which in time prevailed not only with the public but in science fiction itself; that my attitude was symptomatic of much of the serious work that had been done in the field since Campbell — but I am also sure that I misjudged the feelings of many central figures, many of the writers and almost all of the editors. I became convinced that these people did not regard science fiction as a speculative medium *at all* but rather one which was to be functional to the prevailing standards of the larger culture.

There was a lot of fear in those letters. One writer who worked for the space industry clearly felt that his job was threatened, that he might lose it if the *Bulletin* somehow reached his superiors and they found him to be a member of an organization whose bulletin questioned any of their objectives or practices. (The man might well have been right; no argument.) The fear was more generalized in other cases but no less palpable: where did I get off knocking NASA and the government and the President and Bormann and the church of all things just when the Moon project and the enormous attention it focussed were on the verge of making science fiction writing an acceptable profession?

This was a core argument and I could understand it. For decades, science fiction readers and writers had been regarded by the academic/literary nexus and the media as a bizarre group, aficionados of the sub-literate obsessed by the bizarre; now Bormann and the boys were making those crazy stories and the crazy paperbacks or magazines in which they were published appear somewhat predictive. Just at the point where a science fiction writer might get a hearing at the universities, an engineering firm or a suburban cocktail party here was an official voice railing against their great patron. Didn't I understand how it used to be? Didn't I remember how the magazines went to rout in the fifties and how for decades a science fiction writer could not even be regarded as a *writer* by any assistant professor in the Departments of English? Didn't I remember how academically-connected writers had been forced to publish under pseudonyms in the forties because revelation of their activities to the department head might have threatened their jobs? Didn't I remember those two-penny-a-word (at the top) magazine rates and \$500 all rights book contracts? Was I some kind of *nut*? If I had objections to the spirit or the public relations of the project, why didn't I put them in my little quality lit bag of pretensions and shove them somewhere? Was I out to destroy science fiction or something? If science fiction appeared in the position of talking against NASA or the Moon landing what man in the street would ever take us seriously again? One letter — from a literary science fiction writer who was also not so incidentally an associate professor of English — attacked not my arguments but my prose construction and grammar. Another suggested that I was just jealous of the money Bormann was getting, the love that the astronauts

were finding. (Kris Neville defended me but Neville, blessed fellow, hadn't published five stories in the last four years.)

So, tossed out, I went away, at least from the *SFWA Bulletin* (eventually I went away from the SFWA but that is another, less interesting or symbolic an issue and besides like everybody else who quit I've come back to an Official Position) but I took from the experience a not unenduring lesson:

Science fiction, for all of its trappings, its talk of "new horizons" and "new approaches" and "thinking things through from the beginning" and "new literary excitement" and "big money conglomerate advances with heavy adpub and distribution" is a very conservative form of literature. It is probably more conservative than westerns, mysteries or gothics, let alone that most reactionary of all literatures, pornography. Most of its writers and editors are genuinely intimidated by innovative styles or concepts at the outset because they have a deep stake by the time they have achieved any position in the field in *not appearing crazy*. This was certainly true in 1969 when the field was still a minor if marginally respectable genre. It is absolutely true at the beginning of the eighties when it has become, for a concatenation of factors, perhaps the most predictably profitable part of the publishing subdivisions of many conglomerates and when licensing of *STAR TREK* or the Lucas properties can grant hundreds of millions of dollars a year. The conservative nature of science fiction today is no longer an intimation, not even a standard. . . it is a necessity.

Very difficult to squeeze the innovative stuff into the category anymore. Not impossible — witness Benford, Varley, Gotschalk, X, Y and Z — but hard as hell. Why bother, eh Carter? How can you even take it seriously any more? ●

— Barry N. Malzberg



opinion

This column (now updated) first appeared in Galileo's final issue (January, 1980) which apparently did not receive normal distribution and was seen by very few people. — Editor

SOME HERETICAL thoughts, a couple of weeks after coming home from the World Science Fiction Convention.

Maybe what we have here is too much communication. During the course of four or five days at the convention I was interviewed by BBC Television, BBC Radio, French TV, a British semi-pro magazine, a free-lance magazine contributor, and assorted others now blurred in my mind. I took part in countless conversations about my writing with readers. I was handed various fanzines with essays about my

Robert Silverberg

work, my alleged philosophical beliefs, my changing career goals, and all sorts of other surprising things. I was asked to sign a gratifying number of copies of my own books, in the course of which I received all sorts of unsolicited comments about the books I was signing, some of them on the order of "I couldn't figure that one out at all!" and "Say, that one wasn't nearly as depressing as some of the others!" In short, for an entire weekend I was the center of a lot of mad swirling activity wholly and minutely concerned with the career and life of Robert Silverberg. Flattering? Sure. And damaging.

There's no other field of writing in which the writers get so much attention of a direct personal kind from readers and critics. Science fiction sustains an enormous ap-

paratus of conventions, fanzines, correspondence chains, intense critical journals both amateur and academic, and such, all of which bombards the writer with a vigorous and vociferous stream of opinion about his work. Mystery-story writers don't get that. Western-story writers don't get that. Mainstream novelists don't get much of that. What they get are occasional letters from readers, forwarded by publishers or agents, and clippings of their book reviews. We meet the readers face to face, and meet them again every time we open our morning mail. And we confront them in all sorts of indirect ways — Hugo voting, the *Locus* poll, and much more, constantly evaluating, assessing, ranking.

There's something heretical in my questioning the benefit of all this, because I've been part of the machinery for most of my life. As a fan many years ago, I wrote scathing critical essays, sent letters of comment to the sf magazines, even put out my own fanzine. I've attended conventions — a couple of dozen Worldcons and I know not how many lesser events. I've made myself accessible to the sort of information flow that descends on the heads of the writers in our field, and I've done it voluntarily. Nobody forces me to go to conventions or to read the fanzines that show up in my mail.

And yet, and yet, and yet, the whole thing is beginning to seem pernicious to me. I find myself wishing I could go to conventions merely to see my friends and talk to my publishers — my prime reasons for attending, anyway — without having to listen to somebody's brilliant analysis of *Tower of Glass* or dumb remarks about *Dying Inside*, without having interviewers coax me into making pretentious statements of belief, without being subjected a thousand times a day to assessment. I begin to think that all that stuff has had negative effects on me throughout my career — so many voices, murmuring away in the back of my skull, offering their conflicting and contradictory demands and needs and opinions and evaluations as I try to get my work done!

I'm an old hand at the world of science fiction peripheralia, and I'm also stubborn, self-contained, and pretty well determined to do things my own way. So I don't think I've suffered as much as some writers through all this information flow. Yet there's no doubt in my mind that my disillusionment with science-fiction writing, circa

1974-78, stemmed in large part from an excess of communication with my readers. A steady barrage of conversations with clucks, boobs, and dodos led me, at a dark time in my life, to conclude that you were all like that, and away I went to play in my garden. Would I have written more novels and stories in those four years had I never spoken a word in public about my work? Who knows? But I think it's possible.

Some writers never show themselves in the sf whirl. The man who we knew as "Cordwainer Smith" was unknown at conventions; so is the woman we know as "James Tiptree, Jr." J.G. Ballard hasn't been around very much, nor Philip K. Dick, nor Keith Roberts. Some thrive on the hype and hoopla available in our genre, and some hate it. For most of us — myself included — the effects of all this communication are only transiently destructive; I'm sure Brian Aldiss and Fred Pohl and Harry Harrison and Albie Bester and other old pros go home from the conventions with their heads only moderately swelled from all the attention, and return in short order to the normal patterns of their work and thought. But there are effects. I'm coming to believe in a kind of Heisenberg law of sf writing that says that if you expose yourself to the storm of information about yourself that can come your way, you're inevitably going to be deflected from your course — probably without even knowing it.

Currently I'm watching the careers of a couple of newer writers who, hitting it big at the start, received first excessive praise and now excessive criticism. They seem to have survived the first nicely enough, and probably will survive the second, although one of them, it seems, is showing some signs of perplexity and strain. I can't help wondering if they'd both have been happier people if they'd simply sent their books floating down the publishing river and waited for their royalty checks in peace — without all that unsettling feedback.

I don't know. I intend to keep on going to conventions and talking to people. At this stage of my life I'm probably beyond much risk of further harm, and I love the fun of it. But I suspect that isolation from the consumers is a wiser course for the beginning science-fiction writer. Let him wrestle with his own inner demons, without wrestling with thousands of exceedingly articulate readers as well.

Robert Silverberg

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

Tom Stalcar

Special Book Preview

MORE THAN 21 million copies of Ray Bradbury's books have been sold in the United States alone. He has come a long way since 1938, when the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society consented to publish one of his stories in its mimeographed fanzine *Imagination*. The Alfred A. Knopf Company has just published a massive hardcover collection called *The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (\$17.95). It contains one hundred stories, including some which were not previously collected in book form, and it covers the entire range of his long career.

Like *The Stories of John Cheever* and other mainstream books, this one is being promoted in ways that most sf writers only dream about: a favorable review in *Time Magazine*, appearances of the writer on the *Today Show*, and copies of the book placed beside the biggest sellers of the moment in bookstores.

It was not always this way. In his introduction to William F. Nolan's bibliographic work *The Ray Bradbury Companion* (Gale Research, 1975), Bradbury wrote: "It is hard for the modern reader, born during the past two decades, to realize how difficult times were in 1949. We so-called science fiction writers have always had doubts about that rather dubious label. Mainly because gangs of intellectual apes have clubbed us for a full lifetime, and when they weren't beating us were busily ignoring us. There seemed no way to win or please. Naturally, most of us grew up with at least a tinge of self-doubt and inferiority. What if what the bright apes said at their literary teas were true? We were, then, figures of fun."

I asked Ray Bradbury about labels and his attitude toward them: "People need labels to categorize by, and sometimes to



photo by Tony Hauser

Ray Bradbury, author of *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*, a collection of the 100 best stories of his extraordinary career. Published by Knopf.

damn by," he told me. "We should call most sf writers by the label: writer of the history of ideas. For that is what we are, when we are being fantasists. My career divides itself into about one-fourth sf, 50 percent fantasy, and the final fourth what I might call romantic magic realism (my Illinois story, my Chicano stories, etc.)."

Along with hard-fought success in selling stories to the mainstream magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, and *The New Yorker*, Bradbury seemed to generate hostile feelings from some sf people. In the 1950s Damon Knight wrote (in his essay on Bradbury which is reprinted in his Advent Publishers book *In Search of Wonder*, revised edition 1967): "Bradbury's Mars, where it is not as bare as a Chinese stage-setting, is a mass of inconsistency; his spaceships are a joke; his people have no faces." (p. 109) Of Bradbury's publication in the major magazines, Knight wrote: "The slicks, which began buying him as a curiosity when he was horrid, kept on buying him as a staple when he turned syrupy." (p. 112)

Although millions of readers accepted him, and his critical acclaim grew, some sf people to this day attack Bradbury for being unscientific. I asked him if harsh comments hurt him less now than when he was struggling to get his early career started: "Harsh comments or compliments, both must be ignored," he told me. "They have nothing to do with the work. The work exists because it asks to be born. When it is finished, it is too late for praise or blame, the stuff

simply IS."

He declined to comment when I asked him if he thought some of the reactions from sf people possibly grew out of their envy of his success outside the sf "ghetto." "I haven't the faintest idea how to answer that," he said. "You answer it for me, eh?"

Discussing sf fandom however, the writer refused to characterize himself as an ex-fan of sf and fantasy, although I suggested to him that his involvement with fans and conventions was less than that of Ellison and Asimov, each of whom began in fan activity before their professional careers were established. "I never broke with fandom, ever. I still lecture at the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society anytime they need me. My friendship with Forrest Ackerman goes back 43 years, and still exists. I attend Comic Conventions, and local conventions. Was at the Berkeley World SF Convention 10 years ago.

"Most importantly, I have encouraged younger fans, in a 30-year period, to become writers. Charles Beaumont came into my life when he was 16. I read and helped sell his first stories, and remained his friend, critic, and reader until he died, more than 12 years ago. William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson, both fans, both would-be writers, came to me 27 years ago with stories which I read, criticized, and helped place with magazines or agents. Richard Bach was my student, came to me as a young aviator wanting to write. Result: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Etc., etc., etc. Richard Matheson, 30 years ago, wrote me fan letters. I encouraged him to move ahead with his writing. I did not teach him. He was not a disciple. But we were friends by mail and later in person. I have known Harlan Ellison for years and, though we are different kinds of writers, I respect him for his enthusiasms and his love of literature. So, you see, I have never been out of touch. My friendships with Leigh Brackett and Edmond Hamilton went on until their sad deaths."

Unlike most writers, Bradbury has written successfully for stage productions, radio, television, film, and poetry books, as well as for publication in magazines and books. I asked him if the same or different creative needs were satisfied in various forms of writing. "With poetry or plays, the same creative joy comes into the process. The same applies to stories. Nothing is worth doing unless it is passionate and fun. Everything else is stale and dreadful.

Everything must be damned glorious and all-encompassing, or it won't work as a creative endeavor."

Two hardcover collections of poetry by Bradbury have sold well in Knopf editions: *When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* and *Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run Round in Robot Towns*. He told me how he viewed his poetry: "Poetry is just as important as anything else I do. I never do anything unless I feel it. I only took on the job of writing *Moby Dick* for the screen because it was powerful Shakespearean poetry. Poetry is often the germ-seed beginning of a story or a novel for me."

Film and TV adaptations of his written works have often disappointed him. A rumor was reported in several publications in 1980 that he was very unhappy with the way *The Martian Chronicles* was handled as a television mini-series. "*The Martian Chronicles* was, in the main, boring," Bradbury told me. Asked if he was ready to give up on TV, he said: "No, I haven't given up on TV. I'm just wary. I'm now finishing a one-hour script for NBC on *I Sing the Body Electric* to be shot this winter and released in the spring."

Along with his passion for fantastic stories, Bradbury also loves the tales of Sherlock Holmes. He recalled for me how this interest began for him: "I heard the Sherlock Holmes radio shows on the radio in upper Illinois as a child of ten, sponsored by G. Washington's Instant Coffee. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was the first I heard. Lovely, spooky stuff. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is my favorite Sherlock Holmes tale, still. I don't belong to the Holmes scton society here in Los Angeles, I just attend meetings on occasion."

Machines and technology, and their roles in his stories, have been the subject of much comment through the years. Although he highly praises space exploration, the excitement of which he captured so well in his story "The End of the Beginning" (collected in *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*), his stories such as "The Pedestrian" show a gloomy, fear-filled tomorrow in which humans are at the mercy of machines which they no longer control. Bradbury refuses to drive a car or to be a passenger in an airplane. For years he refused to allow a phone in his house, because strangers could cause him to have to answer it, thus intruding upon his privacy.

I asked him about machines and

THE STORIES OF RAY BRADBURY

technology and his reply was brief: "I do not fear machines, only the men who use them incorrectly. It's that simple. Nothing wrong with nuclear power except possible mismanagement. Ditto computers or, name your own machine."

I asked him what he had been reading lately that he found most enjoyable. "The prefaces of *The Plays of George Bernard Shaw*," he answered. "What a man, what a brain, what a life!"

Asked which single work of his own, in any medium, he would want preserved in a space vehicle carrying within it the artifacts and examples of human culture, he replied: *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (his novel, available from Bantam Books).

Assessing the Knopf collection *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*, the reader is at first overwhelmed by the vivid images, sensual impressions, and emotional interaction between the writer and reader. Long after other stories are forgotten, one tends to recall favorite Bradbury images in detail. The mournful sound of the dinosaur's lament in "The Fog Horn," the fragrance in the attic that had "A Scent of Sarsaparilla," and the sights of a small Midwestern town somehow before the eyes of the spacemen in "Mars Is Heaven," are part of the reason that Bradbury's fiction appeals to tens of millions of people, decade after decade. As each phase of the trends in sf comes and goes, the Ballantine Del Rey editions of *Fahrenheit 451* and *The October Country*,

and the Bantam paperbacks of *The Illustrated Man*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, *Long After Midnight*, and many others, continue to sell to delighted readers.

Bradbury's science may not always be technically accurate, but he has no need for it to be. All the background details in his Mars stories are not filled in — his readers fill them in, just as he planned all along. Bradbury is a giant in the literature of the fantastic, appealing to a wide spectrum of people, not just the group that checks the accuracy of sf stories with a pocket calculator and a star-chart.

The Stories of Ray Bradbury contains a well-chosen one hundred tales out of the more than five hundred published works of this master fantasist: from his early weird stories and horror tales such as "The Small Assassin," to his recent stories written for *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, this major collection is a powerhouse.

Those interested in Ray Bradbury should be aware of two non-fiction books which have recently been published.

Ray Bradbury by Wayne L. Johnson (Frederick Ungar Pub. Co., \$9.95 hardcover, \$4.95 paperback) is the first book-length study of Bradbury's life and works. Written in lively, readable prose, it is aimed at both the general reader and the academic and library audience. Sf readers as a whole will find the book more accessible and useful as a guide to Bradbury's works than the usual academic works, although it is based on solid research and has an accurate bibliography.

Taplinger Pub. Co.'s *Ray Bradbury* edited by Joseph D. Olander and Martin Harry Greenberg (\$12.95 hardcover, \$5.95 paperback) is a collection of essays by college professors who examine the frontier myth, children, Mars stories, and other aspects of Bradbury's body of work. Some of the essays are rather dry for the general reader, but college students and people who want a detailed critical analysis of Bradbury's fiction will be pleased by the Taplinger collection. The company also has available essay collections about Asimov, LeGuin, Heinlein, and Clarke, with others to follow.

Golem¹⁰⁰ By Alfred Bester. Simon & Schuster, \$11.95; Pocket Books Timescape paperback \$2.25. Alfred Bester is in the habit of writing books which become classics. It is early to place that honorary ti-

tle on *Golem*¹⁰⁰ but the evidence is there, nonetheless. Bester has written a novel which smashes itself against all the barriers placed in its path and breaks through them. The challenge here was to produce a work which transcends the average linear novel, while not tossing out important story values, entertainment, or accessibility. Bester has achieved this in *Golem*¹⁰⁰, telling the story of a terrifying beast unleashed from its bonds in the netherworld of our psyches, and doing that storytelling in the most extraordinary and extravagant manner possible.

Alfred Bester is multilingual as well as superintelligent. Only he could make puns which require a knowledge of two foreign languages to understand, throw in a musical composition with scoring included, and make asides in Latin, Italian, German and French which are sprinkled through the text like spices. There is also a recipe, some cartoons and symbolic drawings showing a journey through the inner mind. These drawings are exceptionally exciting, providing actual story information in the form of symbols, rather than merely illustrating what is already contained in the text. Outside of graphic story books and Bester's own *The Stars My Destination*, this is seldom done in sf. At no point are Jack Gaughan's drawings superfluous to the needs of the reader; indeed, they are integral parts of the progression of ideas.

In *Golem*¹⁰⁰ the elements of the detective novel blend with those of the sf story. In a rough section of the world known as the Guff, a black woman named Gretchen

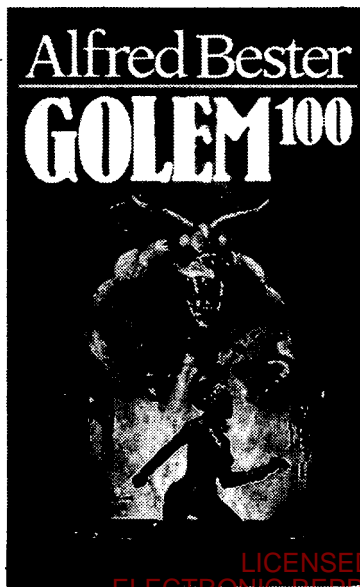
Nunn leads a feminist commune in a ritual which brings forth a deadly creature which turns out to be the product of the human psyche. This monster has waited for his chance to escape from his Phasmaworld and enter ours. Using this gateway, the hateful and despicable creature victimizes unsuspecting people while running from his pursuers. The novel shows his evil nature to be an extension of the dark side present in all human beings, although most people live out their lives without actually becoming a killer or a rapist.

It is probable that *Golem*¹⁰⁰ will someday be recognized as an outstanding novel equal to the best that science fiction has to offer. A swirling melange of William S. Burroughs, Charles Olsen, LSD poetry, Haight-Ashbury underground newspapers and James Joyce, this novel shows again that a writer of Bester's stature can break free of any supposed limits set on the printed sf novel and produce a work of genuine art.

Shatterday By Harlan Ellison. Houghton Mifflin Company, \$12.95. Ellison appeared in *Amazing Stories* twice in the past year, with my interview in Nov. 1980 and his story "Run, Spot, Run" in Jan. 1981. Those of you who are established devotees of his award-winning writings will be delighted to know that *Shatterday* contains the best of his recent uncollected stories, ranging from "Django," "Jeffrey Is Five," "Count the Clock That Tells the Time" and "Opium," to this major new novella "All the Lies That Are My Life." If you have heard about Ellison but have read little by him, *Shatterday* is a quite representative collection and a good place to start catching up on this energetic and dedicated man's writings. His inimitable story introductions are as personal and soul-baring as ever. *Shatterday* is the latest outpouring of honest emotion and literary art by a writer who has never been content to make the safe moves or seek the secure position.

Late Entry

All The Lies That Are My Life, by Harlan Ellison, Underwood-Miller, San Francisco, a limited trade edition, \$12.00. A nice companion volume to *Shatterday* for collectors of Ellison (if any copies are still to be found). "All The Lies That Are My Life" is a novella which also appears in the *Shatterday* collection, but this book is embellished



with some words of rebuttal by a principle in the roman a clef, Robert Silverberg, plus gossipy, nostalgic afterwords by Norman Spinrad, Vonda McIntyre, Robert Sheckley, Phillip Jose Farmer, Thomas Disch and Edward Bryant. There are even footnotes to Farmer's afterword by the author, and a *finally* final afterword to the footnotes! If Ellison hasn't revealed the whole truth in his novella, his friends fill in some gaps with irresistible insights and anecdotes that make you feel like a fly on the wall who witnessed a zany evening with all these inventive people, maybe in Ellison's semi-circular art deco dining pavilion. A great read. In addition, the volume is handsomely illustrated by gifted Los Angeles artist Kent Bash. A portfolio featuring all nine illos from the book in 16"x20" fine art prints is available from THE BASH NIGHT-GALLERY. See page 53 for details. — Editor

Science Fiction Origins Edited by William F. Nolan and Martin H. Greenberg. Popular Library, \$2.25. Sometimes an idea or an imaginary world can be too large for a piece of short fiction to contain it. *Science Fiction Origins* brings together seven short stories and novellas which inspired sf novels by Robert Silverberg, Philip K. Dick, Roger Zelazny and others. It is fascinating to see what the earliest versions of these books were like. Arthur C. Clarke's master-

work *Childhood's End* (Del Rey Classic, \$2.25) began with the story "Guardian Angel" and Ray Bradbury's best-selling *Fahrenheit 451* (Del Rey Classic, \$2.25) had its start in a novella called "The Fireman." Bradbury's story had not been reprinted since 1951, until *Science Fiction Origins* published it. Some of the writers added prefaces for the stories in which they explain how the transformations from short fiction to novels took place.

Writing Science Fiction: Roger Zelazny two cassette tapes, 120 minutes, \$12.95; **Isaac Asimov Talks: An Interview** one cassette, 59 minutes, \$8.95. *The Writer's Voice, Learning Arts, P.O. Box 179, Wichita, KS 62701.* Asimov and Zelazny were natural choices for these interview tapes, which answer the many questions readers and would-be writers would ask if they had chance to meet these authors. Where, why, and how they write are among the subjects explored in depth. Where else could you discover that Roger Zelazny writes in a nearly prone position or that Asimov believes he will always be remembered for the sf books he wrote more than twenty years ago, regardless of its body of non-sf work which totals more than 200 volumes?

The Last Castle By Jack Vance. Underwood/Miller (239 North 4th Street, Columbia, PA 17512). Special deluxe hardcover edition, \$20.00. "Breathtaking" and "extraordinary" are the first two words which came to mind as I examined this beautiful edition of Jack Vance's famous novel. Alicia Austin's illustrations, in color and black-and-white, are superb. Reproduced on heavy paper stock, accompanying text pages with decorated margins, the illustrations help create one of the most elegant and tasteful books I have seen.

Cosmos By Carl Sagan. Random House, hardcover, \$19.95. Sagan has spent years trying to kindle public interest in astronomy and space exploration. His PBS television series *Cosmos* reaches tens of millions of viewers around the world. This lavishly illustrated book might be called an extension of that television experience. Arranged in sections which match the TV episodes in content, the text supplements the TV script and also includes material which Sagan said did not quite make it through the filter-



ing process of television production. One of the few books which is actually worth \$19.95, *Cosmos* should awaken the sense of wonder in anyone. It is even possible that someone turned on to science by this book could pursue a career in that discipline as Carl Sagan did after he read his boyhood copies of astronomy and science fiction books.

Beyond the Moon By Paolo Maffei. Avon paperback, \$7.95. D.J.K. O'Connell's translation of this Italian scientist's book is just right for this imaginary excursion which takes us from the Moon to a place beyond the limits of the known universe. Working in gradual steps but never watering-down his subject's accuracy, *Beyond the Moon's* author explains the properties of the bodies found in space, including descriptions of suns, galaxies and the regions between them. Illustrated with many photos and diagrams, Maffei's book concentrates on the scientific content where Carl Sagan's book focuses on the biographies of the men and women who made discoveries in astronomy and physics.

Planetary Encounters By Robert M. Powers. Warner paperback, \$2.95. Subtitled "The Future of Unmanned Spaceflight," this book deals with the exciting discoveries made by the robot space explorers sent forth by our space program. Updated with information from the Voyager and Pioneer missions, *Planetary Encounters* contains hundreds of black-and-white illustrations as well as a few in color. This type of book rivals science fiction with the notable difference that these are describing actual landings and flyby missions in our Solar System. I found it interesting that the publisher printed quotations of praise from Ray Bradbury and from Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins. This sounds like a case of Hugo Gernsback's dream of "Today's Fiction — Tomorrow's Fact!" coming true.

Tom Staicar, 34, lives with his wife Joy in Ann Arbor, MI, where he is Supervisor in the Interlibrary Loan Office and selector of SF acquisitions for the University of Michigan Graduate Library.

An avid reader of SF since the age of 10, Staicar has written about it for such magazines as the *Writer's Digest*, *Today's Student*, and *Science Fiction Review*.

DI FATE'S CATALOG OF SCIENCE FICTION HARDWARE

BY VINCENT DI FATE AND IAN SUMMERS



DiFate's Catalog of Science Fiction Hardware, by Vincent DiFate and Ian Summers, *Workman Publishing*, New York, \$8.95 (paper), \$17.95 (cloth). Join Hugo winning illustrator Vincent DiFate, master book designer Ian Summers and sf researcher/writer Beth Meacham on a "fantastic journey to far away worlds and other dimensions". Here is a selective survey of imagined future technological wonders as conceived in science fiction literature — which in some form will most likely one day be as natural as jet travel is today. Take a look at wondrous possibilities down the road — spaceships, flying saucers, anti-grav cars, shuttle-craft, rocketry, starships, solar ships, space habitats, weapons, communication systems, powersuits, lasers, ram jets; androids, cyborgs and more. And all of it illustrated by the man perhaps best characterized by Harlan Ellison: "A rare beastie this DiFate: emerging at birth with calipers in his baby paw; eye of an architect, intellect of an engineer, soul of a visionary." Don't miss this one. A beautiful piece of publishing. — EM ●



an interview with Bob Shaw

Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot

**A great Fan, Science
Fiction Entertainer
and Inventor of
"Slow Glass" . . .**

HAILING FROM Northern Ireland, science fiction author Bob Shaw was born December 31, 1931. He attended the Technical High School, in Belfast, where he developed those skills necessary to pursue a career as a structural engineer. Later, the author worked in aircraft design, industrial public relations, and newspaper journalism. Shaw has been a full-time writer since 1975, and presently makes his home in England.

A longtime science fiction fan, Bob Shaw was actively involved in fandom. Indeed, he, together with several other fans, published a hand-set, amateur fanzine — *Slant* — which was a fifty-page magazine, with a circulation of 150. His early reading in the genre produced a strong desire to write. Disheartened by stories with downbeat endings, he would write new endings to the stories he read, and read them again with his version.

Shaw's interest in science fiction, coupled with his desire to write, led to the sale of his first story — "Aspect" (1954) — which was published in the Scottish magazine, *Nebula Science Fiction*. After selling *Nebula* six successive stories, only to receive a rejection slip the seventh time, he decided to call it quits and take a respite from writing science fiction. Feeling that his work lacked originality and believability, the author packed his bags and decided to see more of the world. Spending three

years in Canada, he returned home to write, invigorated and enthusiastic.

In 1965, after a ten-year hiatus, Shaw made his comeback with a story entitled, "... And Isles Where Good Men Lie," which appeared in *New Worlds*. The following year, he wrote "Light of Other Days," which was featured in *Astounding Science Fiction*, and won him a Nebula award nomination. Delighted by the positive response, he combined the story, with two sequels, into the novel, *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972). Shaw's first full-length novel was *Night Walk* (1967). When he began his career, he viewed himself ostensibly as a short story writer. Writing slowly and in his spare time, Shaw found it difficult to write long works. Later, upon discovering that one need not complete an entire novel in advance of selling it, he turned his attention to longer efforts, with increasingly satisfying results.

Since the publication of *NightWalk*, the author has written a number of popular works, among them: *The Two-Timers* (1968), *The Palace of Eternity* (1969), *One Million Tomorrows* (1970), *Ground Zero Man* (1971), *A Wreath of Stars* (1976), *Medusa's Children* (1977), and *Who Goes Here?* (1977). He has also published three collections: *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush* (1973), *Cosmic Kaleidoscope* (1976), and *Ship of Strangers* (1978). Rich in ideas, Shaw's science fiction explores such

diverse concepts as "slow glass," parallel time-streamers, interstellar warfare, environmental degradation, human transcendence, immortality, alien artifacts, metaphysics, the Bermuda Triangle, and others.

JE: What is it about science fiction that captured you as a youngster, and which continues to hold you until this day?

BS: I don't mind admitting that when I first sat up and began to take notice of the world, I found it to be, in many ways, a disappointing place. No doubt the time and location of my birth had something to do with it — Belfast will never qualify as the Fun Capital of the Galaxy, and in the 1930s the sense of ennui in the streets could be overpowering. That's part of the reason the Irish drink so much and have a predilection for shooting at each other; it helps pass the time. I was a healthy, active youngster, gregarious and fond of sports, so I was reasonably happy for much of the time. But when it rained — which happens quite often in Ireland — and I had to retreat indoors, the blues used to hit me with devastating force. Then I discovered science fiction! A simile I've used before is that it was as though somebody had thrown open a door in a gray circumscribing world and admitted a blaze of mingling, multi-hued rays from the Technicolor universe beyond. I knew at once that this gaudy, mind-blowing literature — with its message that what I had been led to believe was the whole of reality was only a single, limited, temporary aspect of the spangled fabric of space-time — was exactly what I needed, and that I would never have to be miserable again. Those were high expectations, but science fiction didn't let me down. For the next ten years, up to the age of about eighteen, I read nothing but science fiction, thought nothing but science fiction, moved about in the world in a kind of science fiction-induced coma. And I was *happy*. The grayer and emptier the streets became, the harder the rain lashed on the windows, the better I felt as I devoured those magazines. That love affair with science fiction was to shape my entire life, but I doubt if I could really explain it to a young person of today who is lucky enough to be faced with a surfeit of interests and opportunities. I think the time for that sort of thing has passed.

JE: In this regard, how has your "love affair" with science fiction served to shape the

nature and direction of your life?

BS: For starters, it was disastrous for my education. During the years when I was supposed to be working up to university entrance, I was doing nothing of the kind. I was reading science fiction, thinking about science fiction, and in between times I published my own carbon copy magazine at the back of the classroom. It had a circulation of about three, but no doubt the activity was an early indication of my adult interests. Only rarely did it occur to me to listen to anything a teacher was saying and, in retrospect, it seems almost miraculous that I managed to scrape through three years in a college of technology. On the positive side of things, science fiction has equipped me with a profession I really enjoy, a marvelous vocation and avocation.

JE: How active were you in fandom prior to becoming a full-time professional writer?

BS: Very active. When you're helping to produce a hand-set fanzine using solid type and a manual press, you can't avoid being active. I'm still active in fandom, but I place myself very carefully to avoid getting hemmed in with commitments. All the fun would go out of it if I felt I was under pressure.

JE: Why did you turn to writing as a career? What psychological need does it serve?

BS: Mainly because it's just about the best job there is, one which gives me maximum control over my time. I make all the decisions about when and how I work, what I write, what I wear, and so on — and that satisfies the egotist in me. When I worked for other people, I had a series of bosses who couldn't seem to realize that my ideas were better than theirs. They usually insisted on their ideas being put into practice, and that used to make me ill. I mean that both figuratively and literally. For about two years before I quit my job as publicity officer for a shipbuilder, I was plagued with one minor illness after another, and my doctor told me it was a sign of inner conflict. He advised me either to learn to like the job or get out of it, so I got out of it. Apart from all that, I enjoyed writing science fiction and the prospect of being able to do it on a full-time basis was a powerful lure. I'm not sure if writing serves an actual "need" in me. I think everybody occasionally gets an idea which he just has to tell other people about. Most people satisfy that impulse by buttonholing a relative or somebody in a pub, but I like to elaborate my ideas a bit more

and reach a wider audience.

JE: If writing doesn't serve a psychological "need," then why do you write as opposed to investing your life in some other endeavor?

BS: Because I find it interesting and enjoyable. Perhaps I interpreted the word "need" in too narrow a way, but to me finding interest and enjoyment in one's life is more of a privilege than the assuagement of a need.

JE: What is it about science fiction that makes it a profitable genre in which to work?

BS: The fact that it transcends all the other genres. Just think how easy it is to define the western, the crime thriller, the historical novel, and so forth — and how difficult it is to define science fiction. It is a medium which allows the author to do anything he wants, and yet — because of the lack of imposed restraints — inspires him to create his own set of disciplines.

JE: As you view it, what is the primary purpose of "good" science fiction?

BS: This question always makes me feel uneasy. If I thought that science fiction had an official grand purpose, and that everything I wrote somehow had to promote that purpose or serve that cause, I think I would quickly back off. I've heard it said that science fiction's role in society is to accustom people to the consequences of rapid change. However, I don't think it reaches enough people to be effective in that role, and the people it does reach are already keenly interested in the shape of the future, which is why they started reading science fiction in the first place. As in the case of the stage or poetry or ballet or jazz, the only purpose that science fiction has or needs is that of satisfying certain emotional needs among its devotees. What more can you ask?

JE: Do you see science fiction, as you once observed, as essentially "escapist" in nature?

BS: Yes. I do see most science fiction as "escapist" — even doom stories are escapist, because the reader keeps congratulating himself that he is not in that situation and thereby does a double escape. We must be very careful about what we mean by escapism, though. Brian Stableford cannily points out that the reader is fully aware that his escape is only temporary, that leaving the humdrum world and returning to it refreshed is very much akin to taking a holiday. And surely

nobody objects to people having holidays.

JE: Science fiction writer A.E. vanVogt has played a prominent role in your life, particularly in terms of your perception of the genre. How would you assess his impact on you and your career?

BS: My early reading of vanVogt hit me like a shot of LSD — except that LSD wears off after a day or two, while stories like "The Storm" and "Concealment" had a lasting effect on my mind. It's quite impossible for me to explain to a reader of today the intensity of the pang of joy that I got in the mid-1940s on getting the latest *Astounding* and seeing vanVogt's name on the cover. People are quite familiar with his ideas and concepts now, but in those days there had never been anything like them on paper before and they generated an intellectual and emotional excitement that was like a fever.

JE: What was your first professional sale? How did it occur? What were your reactions?

BS: A short story called "The Trespassers" which appeared in the Glasgow-based magazine *Nebula*. That was in 1954 and, because of editorial scheduling, it appeared shortly after my second sale, which was in the same publication. I was deliriously happy, especially when "The Trespassers" was picked up soon afterwards by the *New York Post*. When the check arrived, my father, to whom the whole business of writing was foreign, told all his friends that I had "won" some money. In Ireland when people win money, they often give their friends a token sum (a lucky penny) to predispose fate towards allowing them more wins, and my father was quite hurt when nothing was forthcoming from my first literary earnings.

JE: When you first turned to writing on a full-time basis, you discovered that you weren't particularly suited to working at home. What was it about such work that made it difficult?

BS: It wasn't the work — it was sitting alone at home all day. I wasn't ready for it, especially as living in Belfast meant that I was totally cut off from the science fiction activity that goes on in England.

JE: Some critics have argued that you're quite content to operate within the traditional confines of science fiction. Is that a fair assessment of your work? If so, why have you chosen this approach?

BS: It's a fair assessment, and I find it very interesting that people often seem to

state it as a kind of allegation, as if they're expecting me to bridle a bit and put up a defense. To me, that's a bit like asking a market gardener if he'll always be content merely to grow plants. The thing is that I like science fiction and I'm both happy and proud to be working in the science fiction field. I have no desire to be part of the mainstream literary establishment, and the fact that its members look down their noses at science fiction doesn't matter a damn to me. When somebody writes a science fiction novel and then takes care to ensure that it is published without the words "science fiction" on the cover, I don't think he's striking a blow for the idea that science fiction is emancipated and no differentiation should be made between it and other branches of literature. He is saying quite the opposite. He is saying that even though he has borrowed some of the trappings of science fiction, he is actually a serious writer. It's much the same thing when academics discover all kinds of things in science fiction — except science fiction. Well, I'm a serious writer too. A serious science fiction writer.

JE: Is it more difficult to be successful writing science fiction when you limit yourself to the basic traditions of the discipline?

BS: No. The science fiction microcosm contains a lot of people who have been closely connected with the business for decades and who have read just about all the major works. They tend to forget that new readers are coming along all the time and the things which stimulate them in science fiction are very much the same as would have stimulated their dads and granddads. My deeply learned friends in the science fiction world are very dear to me, but when I sit down to write a book, I put them out of my mind. You might say that I write science fiction for people who haven't read a lot of science fiction.

JE: Do you write more with an American or a British audience in mind? Is there an advantage to focusing on one market as opposed to the other?

BS: Due to my grounding in magazine science fiction, the concepts of America and science fiction were always entwined in my mind. As a teenager, I didn't like reading science fiction stories that were set in England. They always gave me a feeling of unreality, whereas America (which I hadn't then visited) was half a world away and seemed a much more science fictional

sort of place anyway. When I began to write, I automatically gave stories an American bias, in spite of the fact that it was very difficult for somebody who had never been further west than Donegal. My later sojourn in Canada helped in this. There were financial considerations, as well. America was the place where they actually paid you per word for stories, whereas in the United Kingdom at that time the rates were so low that they were expressed in shillings per thousand. Nowadays, I don't consciously focus on one market or the other.

JE: As you view it, does a writer have any special obligation to his readers? Does he owe them anything?

BS: I'd love to think that somewhere there were people getting the same kind of pleasure from my books as I got from my early reading, but that might be too much to hope for.

JE: Now that you've been writing for some time, have you been able to cope with the problem, you mentioned earlier, of working at home? If so, what kind of environment best suits your needs?

BS: Yes, I've adjusted. I work in a quiet room on the third floor of my house, and my family knows to keep out during office hours, which are from around 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. There is nothing in the room which is not connected with my work — only my two desks, filing cabinet, book shelves, telephone, and typewriter. Oh yes, and my pipes and tobacco. I can't work properly without the meerscham blasting away.

JE: Do you find it difficult to discipline yourself to sit down and write every day?

BS: I'm a fairly disciplined writer, starting about 8:00 a.m. every morning (sometimes as early as 6:00 a.m.) and staying at the desk until I've done my set quota. I rely on inspiration to bring me ideas, which I write down immediately and put in a file, and the presence of that file enables me to keep a steady production schedule. Some years as a staff journalist on a large daily newspaper taught me how to pummel the brain into action even when it wants to lie there like a lump of putty.

JE: Is the act of writing easy for you? Do words flow smoothly and effortlessly once you start writing?

BS: No. The act of writing hurts my brain. I can produce about 1,000 words a day, with very rare peaks of around 1,500. Sometimes I resolve to be more productive,

but it never works because most of my output involves me in detailing how characters are reacting to each other. A character is angry, so I sit for a moment and get angry too, then I write down what he says. Perhaps that offends another character, so I switch to him and make myself offended, then I put down his response. Maybe that amuses a third character, so then I have to make myself feel amused, and so on. After five or six hours of that sort of thing, I am emotionally drained, numb, and I have to quit. Usually, I'm fit for nothing the rest of the day except watching television and bathing my throat with a mild solution of whiskey and soda water.

JE: How do you write — in longhand, by dictation, on a typewriter, etc.?

BS: For creative writing, almost always in longhand. I find it far more flexible; somehow, once I see the words in type, they seem to crystallize a bit and it becomes harder to rearrange them. I write on A4 sheets of duplicating paper with a fine-point ball pen and get 700 words to each sheet.

JE: In one interview, you made an interesting point about writers' block — namely, that "it only occurs to people who can afford it." What did you mean?

BS: It doesn't occur only to people who can afford it, but that's the general trend. Writing is hard and demanding work, and people have a natural tendency only to work hard when they need the money. It was a philistine sort of remark for me to make, because it ignores the fact that writers also love their craft, and maybe I only said it because the words fitted together nicely. Have you ever noticed that some of our most quoted aphorisms — like Wilde's "Each man kills the thing he loves" — are completely wrong?

JE: Does your emotional state have a significant bearing on your ability to write?

BS: Not a great deal, although I am a mild manic-depressive, with a cycle of about six weeks. When I'm on a high, I find it slightly harder to sit down and produce, especially if the weather is good. Usually, though, I manage.

JE: What are the major problems you've encountered in developing your own style of writing? How important is style in your overall view of writing?

BS: I've worked hard to fashion my style of writing — and one sign of success in this direction is that two or three reviewers, especially in the States, have accused me of not having any style at all! I'm convinced

that it's the job of the writer to bring the content of a book into as intimate a contact as possible with the reader, and that means clear, simple, dignified prose which does not distract in any way from what is actually being said. When I'm reading something by a more flamboyant stylist and become aware of him doing verbal handsprings, the imaginary world of the story dissolves and I get an intrusive vision of somebody sitting at the typewriter. I know many people will regard this as a pretty philistine outlook, but the great thing about literature is that it accommodates all our different points of view.

JE: Has your approach to writing, particularly from a stylistic point of view, changed noticeably in recent years?

BS: It's difficult for me to be sufficiently objective, but I don't think my approach has changed except, maybe, that the nature of the characters in my stories plays a bigger part in shaping the plot. I don't experiment with new forms or techniques — my creative effort goes into looking for new things to say rather than new ways of saying them. When people say the novel is dead, I have only the vaguest inkling of what they mean, and I think they're wrong anyway.

JE: You're known as a writer who's quite adept at realistic dialog. Are there any good rules to follow when it comes to writing dialog, especially in science fiction?

BS: Two rules stand out. First, speak all your dialog as you write it and weed out anything that doesn't flow naturally. Second, remember that each line of dialog, like each line of narrative, is there for one reason and one reason only — to advance your story. For instance, if a character is a rambling and repetitive speaker, don't show this by putting in great hunks of rambling and repetitive dialog. Find some other way of making the point.

JE: In a recent article, you indicate that you pay particular attention to characterization. Does characterization pose special problems for the science fiction writer?

BS: Characterization in science fiction is a tricky business, for several reasons. The mainstream writer already has a great deal of the work done for him, due to the fact that the reader has previously absorbed millions of words describing the same world. By using only a few words to tell you that a character has a waxed moustache or a habit of spitting on the floor, the mainstream writer is drawing on and making use of that vast accumulation of stored

knowledge, whereas the science fiction writer usually can't do that. The information that a character is fond of Syrian food is virtually useless to us unless we are also told whether Syrian food is cheap or expensive, bland or spicy, posh or common, meat or vegetable, health-giving or adulterated, etc. It would be quite easy for the science fiction writer to get bogged down in trying to fill in all that kind of background, so he has to work a hell of a sight harder, compressing, hinting, sketching, implying, using the technique of selected detail. Another sensitive point is that in some science fiction stories, particularly those dealing with scientific or technical ideas, there isn't much need for characterization and it can actually get in the way of the main business in hand. Put in its crudest form, the joke about the man who dreamed he was eating peppermints and woke up to find all the buttons missing from his pajamas would gain nothing from an extra 5,000 words outlining the man's life story.

JE: What is the proper role of humor or satire in science fiction? What role does it play in your work?

BS: I'm all in favor of humor in science fiction, even though a major U.S. publisher rejected my one comic novel, sight unseen, as a matter of policy, because he wouldn't publish humorous science fiction. Humor provides a vital counterpoint to the seriousness of much science fiction. One of the reasons we don't see too much of it is that — and I can't explain why — it is very difficult to write a science fiction novel which also happens to be funny. What usually comes out is a parody of some other book or type of book, and the field only has room for a certain amount of parody.

JE: In terms of your own writing, what are the distinguishing marks of a "Bob Shaw story?"

BS: I think the most essential ingredient is what I call "exclusive strangeness." A science fiction story should have something which differentiates it from all other types of stories, a central element which cannot be expressed in anything but a science fiction story. Every now and then, I get enamored of an idea which *could* be put across in non-science fiction terms, and each time I write it — no matter how carefully I dress it up as science fiction — I always get found out. My short story "Dream Fighter" is a case in point. One of my favorite old movies is the one in which Robert Ryan plays an aging boxer, once good, who has lost so many

fighths that when his manager accepts a bribe for him to take a dive, he doesn't even tell Ryan. His opponent, who is being built up by the mob, is so obnoxious that Ryan dredges up enough of his former strength and skill to beat the tripe out of him. The manager absconds, Ryan is caught in an alley by mobsters who smash his hands with bricks, and he has to quit the fight game — which is what his wife wanted him to do all along — and their shaky marriage is thereby saved. Out of bad there comes forth good. That story captivated me so much that I decided to lift it lock, stock and barrel. I set it in the future; changed the boxers to espers who could project fear-some visions at each other, and was delighted when it was accepted by *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. My pleasure was tempered a few weeks after publication when I received a fanzine in which a perceptive reviewer of the yarn led off with, "This is the oldest boxing story in the world..."

JE: Do you view yourself more as a short story writer or a novelist? Does one come more easily than the other?

BS: I used to feel I was a short story writer by instinct, but that was mainly because I had very little time for writing. Now that I have time, I feel just as happy with the novel form, and I notice that my short stories are tending to get longer.

JE: You're often described as a practitioner of what might be called, "relevant science fiction" — that is, science fiction which reflects contemporary human concerns. How do you go about making your stories relevant to the world situation?

BS: Basically, by putting humans into stories and interweaving the personal problems and foibles we will always have with the major plot elements. In many science fiction stories, a character is whisked to the other end of the galaxy with zero disturbance to himself or the author, whereas in real life somebody doing a little thing like getting a new job fifty miles away can lead to all kinds of traumas and intra-personal disasters. On the other hand, I see little point in giving characters traits just for the sake of doing so — they've got to be such that when they come into play, they act in a natural-seeming manner on the development of the plot. That's what I mean by "interweaving." I confess to getting very impatient with science fiction novels in which the story bowls along at a good pace in odd-numbered chapters while the author puts

the characters through various pairings and couplings to show that this is adult science fiction which faces up to the facts of life. A classic method of producing a mainstream novel is to put a bunch of characters together and see what develops. My method of writing science fiction is quite the opposite, in that I start off with a situation and see what sort of characters are needed to let me explore it.

JE: To what extent is Bob Shaw visible in and knowable through his fiction? Can your work be described as "autobiographical," in the sense that it reflects your own search for meaning and purpose?

BS: No. I take considerable pains to ensure that this is not the case, but perhaps in doing so I give the game away. My protagonists tend to be brave men with a great capacity for enduring loneliness and hardship, whereas I scare easily, am pathologically gregarious, and am addicted to soft living. I have never been consciously aware of "searching for meaning and purpose," so I honestly don't think considerations like that could have influenced my writing. Essentially, I feel that there's no real place for me in my fiction. Maybe it's because my output for fanzines is almost exclusively autobiographical and that provides a sufficient outlet.

JE: As a writer, do you view yourself more as an entertainer, a teacher, or a combination of the two roles?

BS: I would be proud to be classed as an "entertainer." When you look around the world today and at what the common man has to endure — what bigger favor could one do him than to entertain him for a few hours? Entertainment doesn't have to be equated with mindlessness, of course. If an idea stirs my sense of wonder or makes me laugh or gives me a pang of pity, I do my best to impart the same feelings to the reader, and in doing so I believe I am entertaining him without presuming to teach him anything. As a writer, I concentrate on learning from people.

JE: What are some of the salient themes or problems that most concern you in your work? Are there major ideas or concepts that typify your fiction?

BS: One of the most intriguing problems is that of taking an idea which, if stated baldly, would be wildly fantastic, and presenting it in such a way that the reader is persuaded to suspend his disbelief. My engineering experience helps here by enabling me to work out some practical

consequences of imaginary new inventions. I also try to make the characters in a science fiction story recognizable as real people, and to detail their real reactions to fantastic events. After all, the universe is only marvelous as long as there is somebody there to do the marveling.

JE: A theme that seems to stand out, at least in several stories, is that of "sight." When did this theme first emerge in your work? Have you used it in many stories?

BS: It first appeared, I guess, in the 1966 short story, "Light of Other Days." I have to sound a bit doubtful of this one because I personally don't feel that I have done enough writing on the subject for it to constitute a "theme" with me. I admit to having had a dread of blindness since childhood and to being severely jolted when I contracted quite a serious eye disease, which at one stage threatened my sight. However, I doubt if that would have prompted my subconscious to start throwing up ideas for "sight" stories. It sounds a bit too simple and straightforward, like the kind of Freudian psychology you got in the 1940s Hollywood movies, and my mind is very perverse and complicated.

JE: Do you think your writing has improved markedly over the years? If so, in what ways?

BS: I think I've acquired more control. The end product is getting much more like the story I visualized when I started to write the thing. In my early days, I would plan to write a certain kind of story, then I would get caught in a kind of literary tramline and find myself hopelessly going off in a different direction altogether.

JE: Does the uncertainty of freelance writing, from a financial point of view, give you cause for anxiety and concern?

BS: Very little. The uncertainty makes life interesting. If I wanted to worry, I'd pick something bigger than the possibility that I might one day have to move down to London and take a job. There's no point in being a science fiction writer if one can't adopt the cosmic viewpoint!

JE: Are you concerned with what your peers think of your work? Do their opinions matter in terms of your own self-assessment?

BS: Science fiction, as Brian Aldiss is wont to say, is not an homogeneous thing like a table. That's one of the things that makes it so hard to define. There are some veins of science fiction that I like and others I don't care for; there are authors I like as

people and others that I'm not too keen on — and there's no correlation between what I feel about the man and what I feel about his work. This is, I am afraid, beginning to sound like a pretty slippery sort of an answer, so I'll try to be more unequivocal. When a fellow author likes something I've written, I'm pleased, and I respect his good taste; when another pans something I've done, I'm inclined to indict him for "ultracrepidation" — a word I've been dying to use for ages and which means criticizing beyond one's sphere of knowledge. I'm afraid it still sounds like a slippery answer . . .

JE: Do you find it difficult to read something critical about your work? Do negative reviews upset you greatly?

BS: I reckon I can take my lumps as well as the next man, and when a critic I respect makes a good point, I do my best to learn from it. One of the problems with science fiction, though, is that it has a surfeit of experts who fail to see the most basic fact of all — that in the house of science fiction there are many mansions — and whose principal criterion of a book's worth is whether or not it slots with their own personal preferences. Naturally, one doesn't get too upset over their pronouncements.

JE: You've said, on at least one occasion, that you're often critical of your own work. What is it about you, or your work, for that matter, that often leaves you dissatisfied with the final product?

BS: The only thing I've ever been pleased with on finishing it was the short story "Light of Other Days." Everything else has left me depressed and apprehensive, very much aware of faults. Unfortunately, economic pressures have always prevented me from doing much about it. My idea of nirvana is being in the position to write a first draft, put in a drawer for three or four months, read it with the eye of a stranger, and then do a second draft.

JE: To what extent do you recognize your limits and maintain a check on your ambitions? Are there certain kinds of books you would not attempt because of a felt inability to write them?

BS: I'm a realist on this subject and only choose to do things I can do well. There are many writers who produce books that are totally outside my scope — Aldiss, Zelazny, Priest, Dick, Vance, Le Guin, McCaffrey, Pohl . . .

JE: At this point in your career, do you still take science fiction, as a literature, as

seriously as you did when you started out? Has your enthusiasm for the genre waned with the passage of years?

BS: No. I still take it seriously as a literature, even though I find myself reading less and less of it as the years go on. One of the reasons I don't read much science fiction is that when I've been writing the stuff all day, I don't really feel like spending the evening staring at some other man's output. Another change in my attitude is that, especially in short stories, I now give satirical or comic treatment to ideas I would once have considered deadly serious. It's part of a rueful acknowledgement that the science fiction future we once dreamed of, with Earth becoming a member of a jolly Galactic Federation, seems to be a non-starter.

JE: What do you most enjoy about being a writer? What do you least enjoy?

BS: The thing I enjoy most is the verbal detumescence, getting it out of my system; the thing I enjoy least is being so dependent on the postman, that capricious and callous individual who can wreck my concentration by being two hours late and my peace of mind by not calling at all.

JE: Finally, what are you working on at the present time? What are your ambitions for the future?

BS: At present, I'm working on a novel called *As Long as the Red Earth Rolls*, a title I borrowed from a Kipling poem. It's going to be rather longer than any I've done before — 100,000 words or more compared to my usual 60,000 or so — but I daren't say any more about it for fear of unwinding the creative spring. My ambition for the future is to go on writing until I become rich or drop dead — events which I would prefer to have happen in that order.

Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot is Senior Curriculum Specialist at the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts.

intercom

Intercom seeks letters discussing ideas expressed in articles or fiction on our pages: or something that may be of general interest to our readers.

Dear Elinor:

I rarely argue with an editor over the choice of a story, whether it's my story or anyone else's. However, in the case of "Love Among the Flowers," by Wayne Wightman in the Jan. '81 issue of *Amazing*, I cannot remain quiet. For the opening lines of "Love Among the Flowers" do not belong to Mr. Wightman; they are the property of the estate of the late Albert Camus.

Certainly an editor cannot be expected to have read everything. Perhaps you were not familiar with Camus' *L'Etranger*. Mr. Wightman obviously has seen a translation of *The Stranger*, however, and cannot be excused so readily. And while my many years in Academia revealed that contemporary students often see nothing wrong with plagiarism, sad ignorance is no excuse either. Granted, there is a line to be drawn someplace; is even a single word to require credit? Well, sometimes yes, if the single word is creatively unique. Nobel laureate Murrey Gell-Mann credits Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as the source of "quark" which Gell-Mann and his fellow physicists now use freely in their snark hunt (cf: Lewis Carroll) for sub-atomic particles.

I would maintain that the opening lines of *The Stranger* are equally creatively unique. Mr. Wightman stole them for his story opening. Sadly, "Love Among the Flowers" is a strong piece of writing otherwise that does not even benefit from the theft of lines, lines which originally refer to the ambiguity of an undated telegram in pre-World War II Algeria. Since few send telegrams, dated though they may be, at present, do telegrams make sense in a semi-literate future society?

Regretably, while this story might have marked Mr. Wightman as a writer to watch for is talent, he has become a writer to watch for other reasons.

Dr. Dean R. Lambe
Vincent, Ohio

Wrong on several counts. I was fully aware of the similar opening words in the Wightman and Camus material. I own a copy of Camus' *The Stranger* and have indeed read it, more than once. The wording (not exact, you note) was a deliberate reference to the protagonist's condition as a "stranger" in the very different tale, "Love Among the Flowers," by Wayne Wightman. I think it is a valid device, used by writers as a tribute to other, well-known writers, and is a source of enjoyment for those who recognize the allusion. As much as I appreciate your well-intentioned concern, I must assure you I have total confidence in both Wightman's talent and honesty. — EM

Dear Elinor,

I did get a chance to read the latest *Amazing* and in general it was as wonderful as ever. As far as me writing a letter to the editor — I think that's kinda ludicrous, don't you? What are you, a masochist or something? You want a struggling, unpublished (note: this is the key word) writer to comment on work that has made the grade?

What I will say is that Alan Ryan's "Give Us This Day Our Daily Death" left a very sour taste in my mouth. First — I cannot for the life of me see what is science fiction about that story, and besides the basic theme has been done over and over again — and I don't think that he added anything of worth to it to deserve being published. On the other hand, I dearly loved "Buckeye and Spitball," by Lawrence C. Connolly. Being still a child at heart and remembering that many times what was very real to me, seemed like lies or imaginings to so-called "adults." It brought that feeling slamming back home. Besides, I myself have been guilty of not believing what my son has told me — only to find that he was telling the truth, if only as he saw it in his mind. It was a beautifully frightening story with a moral and a reminder to remember to feed our imaginations like we do our bodies.

The other story that I would like to comment on is "Love Among the Flowers," by

Wayne Wightman. I have read other stories by him and I like this one as well as the rest, except, I still don't understand the method behind the flowers erupting on the skin. I think it is my dense skull, not his writing. As far as commenting on a Harlan Ellison story — NO WAY — I like living, even if it is a daily struggle.

Pat Spath
Editor, *Anthithesis*
Marietta, PA

Thanks for permission to run your letter in *Intercom* and for your comments. Stories pondered, hated, loved, mentioned — have made an impact, and this is one of our main purposes. — EM

Dear Ms. Mavor:

I was really pleased to see how *Amazing* has improved. Over the past year, it has really pulled up quickly out of the depths it sunk to when Ted White was editor. Now, don't get me wrong, he was a pretty good editor, but most of the stories he bought just didn't appeal to me. As a result, I didn't read *Amazing* very often. (When I did, I had a hell of a time finding it. Seems most people thought it had folded years ago.)

Too bad you don't want us to rate the stories each issue, so, instead, I'll just give the three best stories from the three issues published on the new bi-monthly schedule. From the Nov. issue I picked Wayne Wightman's "The Amorophobe" as the best, but, I considered this to be the worst issue of the three latest ones. From the Jan. issue I picked S.A. Robbins' "Trailing the Great White Snail" over the rest. In the Mar. issue "The Bluenose Limit" by John Steakley took Top Honors.

Took a good bit of space there, but one more thing about ratings: If you don't want them in the reader's column, why not put a preference coupon at the back of each issue so we readers can send in our votes?

Now, my main reason for writing this letter: the degrading of films and TV shows in Parke Godwin and Howard Roller's article, "The State of the Artless" (March, 1981) left me feeling insulted. Especially insulting was the remark about *Star Trek* fans being "perennial adolescents wearing Spock ears." I myself am a *Star Trek* fan, and I do NOT wear Spock ears.

Perhaps Mr. Roller and Mr. Godwin need to be reminded that *Star Trek* is the show which spawned thousands of letters

to NBC to stop cancellation, hundreds of conventions, a full-length feature film as well as numerous publications. The authors' misconceptions about *Star Trek* and its thousands of fans can hopefully be cleared up by reading Mr. David Gerrold's article, Rumbings, in *Starlog* #43.

I also disagree with their statement that *Alien* was the only worthwhile sf film of late. I liked *Battle Beyond the Stars*, both of the *Star Wars* films, and most of the other films and TV shows they degraded. Just because a film doesn't make your mind go into high-gear doesn't mean it can't be entertaining.

Finally, I would like to say the following: Parke Godwin, has contributed to both *Galileo* and *Fantastic* magazines. Perhaps that's one reason neither magazine is published anymore. As for Howard Roller, I think he should go back to being a music reviewer. Maybe he would make a little more sense there.

This is my opinion of their article, and, if they or anyone else wishes to reply to my letter, my address follows below.

J.S. Fischer
Rt. 1, Lake Toxaway
N.C. 28747

Godwin and Roller may hurl some hyperbole to make a point, but basically what they were saying was that sf films are moving more toward special effects at the expense of good storytelling, in search of the big, easy buck. They liked *Star Wars* (read the column again) but wonder why "effects" and ideas can't be combined. By the way, I think it was some other goblin that did *Galileo* in, and *Fantastic* is with us still (see cover line above logo) in combination with *Amazing*. Thanks for your comments.

— EM

Dear Elinor,

Happy New Year! I picked up the March *Amazing/Fantastic* today and it's certainly a good way to start the new year by noting (p. 71) that the circulation is starting slowly to climb, or at least you've finally arrested the decline which has been going on since the early '60s almost non-stop. I have a feeling that *Amazing* is eternal, will outlast us all and will be the first sf mag to have a 100th anniversary issue. If I'm still around in 2026 (I would be 74), I hope I can be in it.

I've read the March issue and can't say I liked it all, but John Steakley's debut ("The Bluenose Limit") is very promising. The

story has real emotional power. I could feel the smoldering frustrations and agony of the characters. This is rare in sf.

But there's one jarring note (p.43). John Steakley seems to imply that he was making simultaneous submissions of his stories. I may not have all the facts, of course, but if he really sent out 12 copies of that first story at the same time he probably got them back so fast because no one read them. It is my experience that editors consider unsolicited submissions of this sort (as opposed to an auction set up by an agent) a waste of time because after reading such a story they may only learn that someone else bought it. If anyone sends out copies like that, and gets them all back without comment, it's for the reason I have cited. I think this should be brought up because lots of new writers are going to see the March issue and conclude this is the way things are normally done, possibly thus seriously impeding their careers.

They might be good writers, who would sell if they sent stories to one publisher at a time.

Darrell Schweitzer
Strafford, PA

Good point and one worth emphasizing to new writers. Steakley's story, however, was read because he received comments along with most of the rejection slips. The story is now receiving raves from readers, writers and editors. — EM

Dear Elinor,

A few years ago I sampled your magazine and I didn't like it. But a few months ago I picked up an issue of *Amazing/Fantastic* out of sheer boredom, and I certainly won't call it a mistake. The cover is what caught my eye. I examined it and finally bought it. The cover may have caught my attention, but the contents are what held it — and what still hold it. Your magazine is certainly an improvement over the *Amazing* of the past few years. I would like to see it published monthly soon. Thanks, and a lot of luck.

Leon Franklin
Towanda, PA

PS. I would like to see (on the cover) the sale date of the next issue because I'm driv-

ing my book dealer crazy. Also, I would like to see more pages: You look pitiful compared to my 20 or so IASFM's.

Sale date for Amazing/Fantastic is on or around the 25th of every other month beginning with February of each year. We hope to add more pages soon. — EM

Dear Mr. Bernhard:

I usually disagree with changes in my favorite sf magazines. But your change to the new format is really super. I missed the "Amazing Facts," but "Futures Fantastic," the new feature, was well written and quite enjoyable.

"Run, Spot, Run" is the best Ellison tale I have ever read. I'm sure he likes it, too. The *Amazing Hall of Fame* is good, but I do not like very much reimpresions. Wayne Wightman fiction is better and better.

Well, there is not more to say than Good Wishes to the new *Amazing/Fantastic*.

Pablo Soler Frost
Belisario Dominguez
Mexico

Here is a letter to Publishers' Weekly from Sci-Fi's Grand Old Fan, Forrest J Ackerman, who gave us permission to run it in Amazing's letter column. — Ed

Dear Editor:

Re: Norman Spinrad's savaging of the ubiquitous and not iniquitous term "sci-fi" (rhymes with the universally accepted "hi-fi" and is not pronounced "skiffy") in his PW interview of recent date: Since I am anonymously dismissed as merely a "fan" who created the term "years ago" (1954, to be exact) I should like to present my credentials as a pro and correct Spinrad's erroneous argument.

I was published (*Wonder Stories*, April 1936) four years before Spinrad was born. In the past 23 years I have been editor and chief writer of 173 issues of the pioneer fantasy film magazine on which Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, John Landis and Stephen King cut their fangs; editor of 123 sci-fi pocketbooks; author of the highest paid sci-fi story in history (five sales at \$100 apiece of a short-short one letter of the alphabet in length!); awardee of the first

Hugo (sf* Oscar) and subsequently three international Hugos; agent since '47 for 200 sf* authors; anthologist of a Spinrad work as one of the best sci-fi stories for 1973; creator and curator of the 300,000-piece collection of imaginative literature and artifacts for which the city of Los Angeles plans to erect a museum; TV creative consultant and film script polisher; and, before year's end, I expect to have my byline (solo or co-author) on eight books in the genre.

Yes, I coined the term "sci-fi" and I'm proud of it. It's been embraced in America (numerous dictionaries, three times on the cover of *Playboy*, a full-page ad in *Omni*, the TV news media's review of Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog" as "an excellent example of a sci-fi film"), Finland (where SF is the abbreviation for the country rather than science fiction), Hungary (six clubs), France (*Metal Hurlant*), China (Shanghai Sci-Fi Club), Japan (banzai sci-fi!) and there are hundreds of other non-pejorative examples. There is a vociferous minority in the Imagi-nation, including, I regret to say, such esteemed colleagues and friends as Isaac Asimov, Ben Bova and Bill Rotsler, who detest the term with a pyrotechnical passion which I find incomprehensible. (Former sci-fi foes Bjo Trimble and David A. Kyle have capitulated and A.E. "Slan" van Vogt has always-admired the abbreviation.)

Can you believe it: Norman Spinrad, presently President of the Science Fiction Writers of America, seems completely comfortable, as indeed seem all the 600 members save me, with the articulation of the initials SFWA as "sefwah," surely a silly nonsense syllable suggesting a mishmash of bushwah and syphilis. But I know a lost cause when I see one and would not attempt to abolish "sefwah" any more than I would attempt to empty the ocean with a sieve.

"Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them": in 1929 misguided critics were attempting to brainwash the movie-going public into expunging a certain noxious neoteric term from the vox populi vocabulary. Can you imagine what this heinous household word was? *Talkie!* Silence, please, on the senseless outcry against "sci-fi."

Forrest J. Ackerman
The Sci-Fi Guy
Hollywood, CA

**Editor's note: but sf is sometimes easier to use, especially in publications where readers are familiar with the term.*

Dear Elinor and Crew,

Saw your *Locus* ad. *Amazing!* The way you have resurrected the magazine is nothing short of that. Besides each issue getting better and better, your treatment of contributors is a source of joy to many of us who have been alternately harpooned and ignored so many times.

I have not yet sold you a story, but I feel I should express thanks for the salvaging of *Amazing* as a viable short fiction market in these times of duress and failure (witness *Galaxy* and *Galileo*).

The way all of us writers could help you continue to survive and *thrive* (thereby nurturing one of our own markets) is probably in the area of promotion. What if we could attract publicity on TV, radio or the print media in our local areas? And when one of our stories is published, you might send us extra copies of the issue in question for distribution to same. Maybe one of us might have a connection for promo on a prime-time show — along with the constant parade of authors and publishers hawking their wares. Sf is hot today — so why wouldn't the oldest sf magazine be of general interest?

Maybe my letter will generate some ideas along these lines.

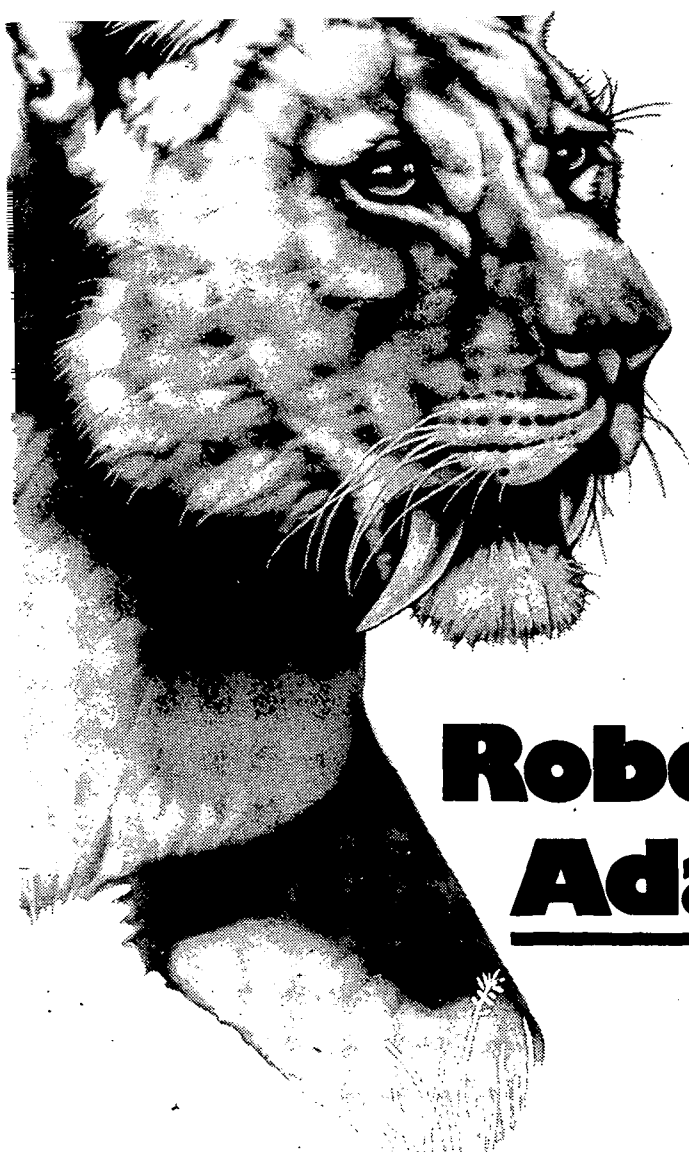
In the meantime — keep on keeping it up. And thanks.

Bob Hawkins
Arlington, VA

Thank you! We hope many of you feel the same and will join the cause. All of us want Amazing and other sf markets to grow. We will gladly cooperate with those of you who can promote us in any way. If you need extra copies of the magazine or know of outlets that would like to sell Amazing, let us know. Probably the most imaginative ideas on promoting Amazing may come from the richest source of imagination we have — our writers. How about it? — EM



Illustrated by Gary Freeman



**Robert
Adams**

the Hunter:

**A Tale of the
Horseclans**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Icy-toothed wind soughed through the denuded branches of the overhanging trees, increasing the chill of an already-frigid day. Somewhere within the forest a branch exploded with the sharp crack of a pistol-shot.

But The Hunter had never heard a shot of any kind and so ignored that sound as she did all natural sounds, concentrating the whole of her attention upon getting as close as possible to her browsing quarry before commencing that deadly rush and pounce that would, hopefully, result in her acquisition of almost her own weight of hot, bloody, delicious meat. Meat! Meat to fill the gnawing emptiness of her shrunken belly, meat enough, maybe, to be worried at by the three kittens waiting back in her den.

But The Hunter knew, too, that she must be close, very close, to have a chance, for she had now but three sound legs. Her left foreleg, deep-gored by the same shaggy-bull whose horns and stamping hooves had snuffed out the life of her mate, was healing but slowly in these days of deep snows and scant food.

As the manyhorn browser ambled a few feet farther and began to strip bark from yet another sapling, The Hunter carefully wriggled a few feet nearer, amber eyes fixed unwaveringly upon her prey, twitching nostrils seeking for the first, faint odor of alarm or fear. Then, suddenly, The Hunter stopped, froze in place, even as the heads of all four browsers came up, swivelled to face a spot just a little to The Hunter's right.

The Hunter saw the muscles of the largest manyhorn bunch under the skin of his haunches. But before he could essay even the first wild leap away from the danger all sensed, a volley of little, thin, black sticks came hissing from the thick cover of a stand of mountain laurel and all four of the browsers collapsed, kicking their razor-edged hooves at empty air, one of them coughing quantities of frothy blood forth to sink, steaming, into the deep, white snow.

A vagrant puff of wind wafted to The Hunter the rare but still-hated scent of two-legs and her lip curled in a soundless snarl. They were trying to rob her of her manyhorns, trying to rob her and her helpless cubs of life itself, for if she did not have food soon, she knew that she soon would lack the strength to get food and her kittens were still too young to hunt for

themselves. Outside the den and without her protection they would be the hunted rather than the hunters.

The lungshot browser, a hornless doe, struggled to her feet and staggered across the tiny glade. Another of the hissing, black sticks sped out of the laurel cover to *thunk* into her heaving flank and she fell again, this time almost under The Hunter's paws. The heady scent of her hot blood filled The Hunter's nostrils and set her stomach to growling while her tongue unconsciously sought her furry lips.

Dik ESMITH unstrung his short, powerful recurved bow and replaced it in his bowcase-quiver. The other three archers emulated the leader, while Dik mindcalled back to where the rest of the hunting party waited with the horses.

"Uncle Milo, brothers, once more has the Clan Esmith demonstrated for all to see the matchless skill at stealth and the deadly accuracy of its bowmen . . ."

"And," broke in a mindspeak that Dik recognized as that of Rahn Linsee, "the longwinded boasting for which Clan Esmith is justly famous. Get to the point, Dik, did you and your blunderers kill the deer or not?"

Dik's horny hand unconsciously sought the wellworn hilt of the saber he had left behind at the beginning of this stalk. "Blunderers, is it? I had always thought, Linsee, that that title was exclusive to Clan Linsee . . . along with 'Cowards'."

"Enough, children, enough!" Command was unmistakable in a third and exceptionally powerful mindspeak. "We are out this wretched day to kill game to feed our folk, not to carelessly begin bloodfeuds. How many deer, Dik?"

"Four, Uncle Milo. But the Linsee filth started it. He had no right to . . ."

"Enough, I said!" came Milo's retort. "Perhaps I should have been certain that I brought men to hunt with me. You do all look like men, you bear the weapons of men, but just now you put me in mind of pugnacious herd boys wrangling over a sickly heifer. Next time, I might be better off to bring a few maiden archers, eh?"

"I . . . I'm sorry, Uncle Milo," beamed Dik, sheepishly. "But he . . ."

"No 'buts'!" Milo's thought beam cracked like a whip. "Rahn was simply joking, weren't you, Rahn Linsee . . .?"

"I . . . oh, yes, yes, of course, Uncle Milo, I was joshing, dear Brother Dik."

And you are lying in your teeth, thought Milo to himself. You were deliberately trying to provoke a fight with the Esmiths because I chose to bring their archers rather than Linsee bowmen on this hunt. But, he smiled to himself, those are my horseclansmen for you, if there're no outsiders around to fight, they'll hop at each other's throats.

Be that as it may though, he thought on, I must have done more than a few somethings right, over the years, else you and your cousin would not be around to snarl and snap at each other. A bare hundred years ago, thousands, millions of people lived hereabouts, and now you could ride for weeks in any direction and not meet any human who does not claim kinship to one of the horseclans. And I doubt that all fifty-odd clans together number as many as five thousand souls.

I think we're somewhere in northern Nevada, or maybe it's southern Idaho. A century back, great, glittering, thoroughly modern cities reared out of the desert to the south of us, hell, they even raised crops in places where we'd now lose all our herds from thirst and hunger were we crazy enough to try to make it across.

Who could ever have imagined, back then, that ten dozen scared, ragged, starving kids could not only have survived the death of the world into which they'd been born but that their direct descendants could have so well adapted to a hideously hostile environment and become fearless, self-reliant men like these.

THE HUNTER flattened her long-furred body to the snowy ground and moved not a whisker, for she wanted none of those little, black sticks coming at her. But neither was she willing to leave so much meat, either.

She watched four two-legs, covered in animal hides and furs, rise up from the shrubs that had hidden them. Pulling out long, shiny things, they went from one to another of the downed manyhorns, cutting open the big throat veins and holding hollow horns to catch the hot, red blood which they then drank off with smiles and relish.

The Hunter could hear other two-legs and the rather stupid, hornless four-legs that often carried them on their backs com-

ing closer from upwind. If she was to have any chance of getting clear with one of those dead manyhorns, it must be done quickly.

The first four two-legs had stopped drinking blood and now three of them were dragging the largest manyhorn toward a large tree on the other side of the glade. The fourth was shinnying up the bole, a rawhide rope clenched between his teeth.

The Hunter had wormed herself to the very limit of available concealment. Only a partially-snowcovered log and a body-length of open ground now lay between her and the dead doe. With careful speed, she drew her powerful hinder legs beneath her, then sprang over the log, landing almost beside the carcass.

The two-legs were entirely absorbed in fitting the rope between the large tendons and the bones of the buck's rear legs. The Hunter sunk her long fangs into the doe's blood-splashed neck and silently dragged the booty away into the woods.

RAHN LINSEE strode into the glade, just behind Uncle Milo. Though big for his breed, Rahn still was a head shorter than Milo Moray. The other differences between the one man and the others were not so easily apparent, not that any horseclansman or woman would have even considered questioning said differences. They all had known or known of Uncle Milo all their lives — he did not winter with the same clans every year. Their parents had known him all their lives, and their grandparents and all their ancestors back to the very Sacred Ancestors whom Uncle Milo had succored and led upon the path to their present greatness.

Uncle Milo never changed. Horseclansmen might be born, toddle about the camps between the felt yurts, guard the herds until their wartraining was complete, then ride the raid and take heads or booty or women; they might then die, old and wrinkled and whitehaired, full of glory and glorious memories, surrounded at the last by their get and the get of their get. But Uncle Milo would be the same tall, blackhaired and darkeyed man who had drunk the health at their birth.

Mothers told curious children that Uncle Milo was a god. That he was the only god to survive the awesome War of the Gods. As the children grew older, they found it hard

to consciously believe godhood of this man who rode and ate and drank with them, slept in their yurts, often swiped an offered young wife or concubine, who sweated and bled and defecated like any other man. But in their subconscious, the teachings of childhood were often strong.

But no less strong was Rahn Linsee's pugnacity. "Hi, Dik Esmith! Always has it been said that the Esmith clan were a mite slow of thought, but only a very stupid man cannot tell the difference between three dead deer and four dead deer. Or did you have all ten fingers tucked up your arse to keep them warm, eh?"

Uncaring that his tormentor went fully-armed with saber and dirk at his belt, Dik spun about from the hung buck he had been flaying, took two running steps and flung himself upon Rahn, seeking to get his teeth, nails or blood-slimed skinning-knife into the hated flesh.

At Milo's impatient mindspeak and gesture, the rest of the party lifted the battling men, jerked them apart most ungently and prudently disarmed them both.

Milo strode before them, scowling darkly. "Damn you both! Your chiefs shall hear of this, from me! While you are in camp, I don't care if you blind, maim or chop each other into gobbets, but a raid or a hunt is no place for personal grudge-fighting, and you both are old enough and experienced enough to know that fact. What in hell kind of example do you think you're setting for these younger warriors, eh? Do you even care?"

"Your ancestors knew better, knew that their folk were only so strong as their ties — blood and kin — one to the other. Are their descendants then idiots? The hand of every Dirtman, every non-Kindred wanderer, is against the Horseclans. As if those were not enemies enough, the very elements would deny you and your herds life."

He motioned that the men be released. "Dik Esmith, Rahn Linsee, this winter has been very hard and is lasting longer than most. We dare not take much milk, now, because the calves need it, but our folk must have food. These deer could mean the difference between life and death for some. So let's get about preparing them for packing before the wolves scent all this fresh blood."

As the men began to move off, he raised his voice in a parting admonition. "And

hear me, I'll put my saber through the next selfish roughneck who tries to start a fight, here."

When the three deer were all hung and cleaned and the meat and other usable portions wrapped in their own hides and lashed onto the packhorses, Milo, Dik and Rahn examined the bloody spot on which the missing doe had lain: Several large pugmarks were deeply pressed into the snow.

"Puma?" mused Rahn, aloud.

Dik snorted. "No puma ever grew feet that big, nor any lynx, either." He scratched after a flea under his parka-hood. "But . . . maybe one of those spotted cats the southern Dirtmen call 'teegrai'?"

Milo shook his head. "No, this animal is a little bigger and a good deal heavier — if these tracks are any indication — than any jaguar or tigre I ever saw." Reaching over to a fallen log, he pulled several long, silky hairs from where they had caught in the rough bark. They were a creamy-buff for most of their length, tipped with a dark grey.

He stood and the two horseclansmen emulated him. "Rahn, take all but three of your men and go back to the camp with that meat. I'm going after that cat, whatever kind it is, I think it's pelt would make a handsome saddlecover. Besides, it did steal our deer. I'll take Dik, two of his bowmasters and a couple of your spearmen with me. The other two men can stay here in the clearing and guard the horses until we get back."

A HUNDRED yards into the thickening forest, The Hunter could no longer resist the temptation. Dropping her burden at the base of a tall pine, she used her dagger-like fangs to rip open the doe's belly, then tore out greedy mouthfuls of the tender, still hot viscera.

From behind a bush, a vixen thrust out her wriggling black button of a nose and a couple of inches of her silvery-grey jaws. The Hunter placed her good forepaw atop the darkbrown carcass and rippled a snarl of warning. The nose and jaws disappeared and the vixen scurried away . . . but not far; she knew her turn would come and she had the patience to await it.

The sharpest pangs of hunger temporarily assuaged, The Hunter arose, gripped her somewhat lighter burden and limped on toward the isolated stand of rocks wherein

lay her den and her hungry kittens.

When The Hunter was well out of sight among the dark boles of the trees, the vixen crept from beneath the snow-laden bush and first cleaned up every scrap of gut or organ, then began to lap at the bloody snow.

WITH RAHN LINSEE and the bulk of the hunters on their way back to the two-clan-camp, Milo and the remaining men unsaddled their horses, then broke down squaw-wood to build a fire for those who would remain in the glade with the animals. That done, they set out on the clear track of the big cat with its stolen deer.

They had only gone a few yards when Djim Linsee, a gifted tracker, squatted over the pug-marks and said, "Uncle Milo, this cat may be big, but it's hurt, too."

Milo squatted beside the broken-nosed towhead. "How can you be sure, Djim?"

The tracker pointed a grubby forefinger at first one, then another print. "You see how deep and clear this track is, Uncle Milo? And how shallow and fuzzy is this one? The cat's putting as little weight as possible on the left leg. It must be a really big cat though, and very strong to drag so big a deer so easily with only three legs."

They went on cautiously, the bowmen with their weapons strung, one arrow nocked and one or two others between the fingers of the bowhand. The spearmen followed close behind, hefting the balances of their six-foot wolfspears. Milo had armed himself with three stout, yard-long darts. Like the others, he had hung his saber diagonally across his back to keep it out of the way in the thick forest.

The vixen's keen ears heard their approach long before they came into view and she was nowhere about when they arrived at the base of the big pine.

Djim squatted, picked up a shred of gut missed by the grey vixen, rubbed it between his fingers, sniffed at it and then tasted it. His pale-blue eyes on the ground, he said, "The cat stopped here, Uncle Milo, tore the deer open and ate most of the innards. Then . . ."

He fell silent, then bent over to peer closely at a patch of snow that looked to Milo like any other. Extending his tongue, the towhead tasted some near-invisible something, then straightened, grinning. "Uncle Milo, the cat is a she-cat and likely is

nursing kittens. That stain there where she laid is milk, cat-milk.

"After she ate her fill of the deer's innards, she headed that way." He swept his arm to the northwest. "Then a grey fox was here to pick up her leavings."

As they trudged on after the cat, Milo thought: Damn! That man is no more than twenty-five years old, yet he's acquired knowledge and skills, a keenness of smell and an acuity of vision that I've not picked up in the hundred-fifty-plus years I've been around. Then he mentally shrugged. Maybe I never will become as these people of my fashioning, I think it's the early life, the formative years. Mine were spent — to the best of my knowledge, of course. Damn, there's always that memory-lapse or whatever to screw up any calculations! — in a degree of urban civilization that these fine men could not even imagine and which, were they suddenly put down in it, they would find terrifying and abhorrent.

He thought hard, thought back and back, trying to dredge from out his memory the America of the last quarter of the Twentieth Century. He sought to recall how it was nearly eight-score years now past, before most of the nation's two hundred millions were returned to the dust, before the cities and towns were become only ruins, crumbling and overgrown.

At last, he desisted. He could evoke a dim ghost of a memory, but no more. It had just been too long, too many more recent scenes overlay that long-dead past, now. Funny, he could easily remember women he had had, back then, in some detail, could recall the performance of fine cars and boats he had owned, but still the broader picture of that lost world eluded him.

"Just as well, likely." He muttered under his breath. "Let the dead stay buried. They'd be as lost in this time and environment as we would in theirs."

The bowman ahead of him in the single file half turned, "Yes, Uncle Milo . . . ?" He mindspoke.

Milo smiled and answered as silently. "Never mind, Pat. I was talking to myself."

The ground was harder underfoot, under the layers of snow, the men's boot-soles now frequently slipped on the surfaces of rocks and boulders thrusting up from out the frozen earth, forcing them to throw out their arms for balance or grasp at

trees and shrubs for support.

At an overly-thick copse of brush and trees, the spoor veered to the right and the hunters relentlessly followed it.

THE HUNTER was aware of her pursuit very soon after it commenced, since her pursuers made almost as much noise as a stampeding herd of shaggy bulls. But, she was easily maintaining her lead, despite the weakness and lancing agony that her left foreleg was become with the strain of dragging the stiffening, heavy carcass through the breast-deep snow and over the rough ground beneath it. Only when she neared the hillock atop which lay her den did she decide to take action against the persistent two-legs: Perhaps if she killed one of the pack the others would feed upon him, as wolves did, and give her time to cover her trail to the den.

The Hunter had never had much contact with two-legs, but she had seen her mother killed by them, pierced through and through with the hateful little black sticks, then pinned to the ground, still snarling and snapping and clawing, by a longer stick in the hands of a two-leg sitting high on the back of a hornless four-leg. She did hate two-legs, did The Hunter, but she also respected them, so she laid her ambush with care.

She continued well past the spot she had chosen, then adroitly broke her trail by leaping atop a fallen tree-bole from which the night winds had scoured the snow. Climbing atop the mass of dead roots and frozen earth, The Hunter reared to her full length and carefully hung her precious deer over the broad branch of a still-standing tree. Below that branch, the trunk stood bare and the bark was slippery so the carcass should be safe from the depredations of any other predator save perhaps a bear or another cat. And the only bear that stalked hereabouts was denned up a full day's run to the north. The few small cats ran in mortal fear of The Hunter and would never venture so close to her den.

The soil was thin and rocky on the hillslope and, over the years, many a tree had fallen to storms and winds. The Hunter now made use of these raised ways to make her way back to the ambush point she had chosen without leaving telltale tracks in the snow. Arriving at last in the thick brush, she belled down and made a swift and silent

passage to the opposite side of the copse. There, she crouched, motionless as the tree trunks themselves, waiting.

The first two-leg, slightly-crouched above her tracks, came abreast of The Hunter, then passed her, a long, shiny-tipped stick dangling from one forepaw. Then came two two-legs, each grasping one of the horn-covered sticks that threw the deadly little black sticks; them, too, she allowed to pass around the point of the copse.

The third was bigger than the others, which most likely meant that he was leader of the pack, thought The Hunter. He bore neither long stick nor short but three of an intermediate length. Soundless as death itself, The Hunter hurled her weight upon this pack-leader. Even as she bore him to earth, she thrust her good, right forepaw around his head, hooked her big claws into the flesh over the jaw, then jerked sharply back and to the right.

The Hunter growled deep satisfaction at the snapping of the neck. Then she spun upon her haunches and bounded back into the brushgrown copse, leaving the other two-legs shouting behind her. Many of the little black sticks were hurled after her, but only one of the hastily-aimed missiles fleshed and that one only split the tip of her ear before hissing on to rattle among the tree trunks.

Well satisfied with her stratagem, The Hunter negotiated the width of the copse and made her way back to where she had cached her deer, directly, this time, for there now was no need to hide her spoor. Soon she and her three kittens would be feasting upon tasty deer flesh, while the two-legs would probably be tearing at the carcass of their dead leader.

MILO COULD not repress a groan as Dik Esmith dabbed a bit of homespun cloth at the hot blood gushing from the claw-torn cheek.

"Let be, Dik, let be." He gasped. "That cat is not only canny, she's strong as a horse. She broke my neck like a dry twig, but it will knit quickly enough. Just leave me here.

"She's most likely broken trail, so some of you had better scout around and see where the spoor takes up again. Djim, you and a couple of bowmen backtrack her through that copse, but be damned careful,

you've all seen what she can do."

Milo lay still, feeling the pains of regeneration of bone and tissue already commencing. He was aware that Dik and one other squatted nearby, unwilling to leave him hurt and alone in this cold and dangerous place.

"They're good men," he thought, "all of them. I'm glad it was me that that wily flea-factory chose as victim and not one of them. In thirty minutes, those tears in my cheek will be fading scars and even the vertebra will be sound again in an hour or less. But if she'd jumped one of them, we'd be bearing a well-dead Linsee or Esmith back to camp."

For the many-thousandth time he wondered what had made him the kind of being he was, wondered if he was unique on the Earth or if, somewhere, there might be others of his kind. Over the course of the hundred-fifty-odd years of life he could remember, he had suffered wounds enough to have slain a hundred ordinary men — he had been gunshot, stabbed, slashed, cut and clubbed. Once an axe had taken off his left hand above the wrist, but it had regrown, twice he had lost the same ear, yet he now had two.

With an agonizing tingle, life was coming back into his arms and legs and body. When he could easily flex his limbs and abdominal muscles, Milo rose to sit propped on his hands.

Shortly, Djim Linsee approached and proffered a horn cup of clear, icy water. Milo gulped the fluid gratefully.

The tracker sank down before him. "There are many fallen trees just beyond this place, Uncle Milo. The cat must have doubled back across them, for we could only find the tracks she made when she ran away. She had hung the deer up in a tree and, after she took it down, she went uphill at an angle to the right until she came to flowing water. The streambed is all rock, so where she went from there, upstream or down, is anybody's guess. But I have a feeling..."

"That she went upstream?" asked Milo.

Djim nodded quickly. "Cats always seek high places. I climbed a tree on the stream-bank and looked uphill. The slope is very much steeper, farther on, but the top of the hill is flat and level and virtually treeless. Near the center of the hilltop is a high and spreading pile of rocks. True, I could not

see any openings that looked big enough for such a cat to go into, but then I could only see the one side.

"Don't ask me how, Uncle Milo, but I know her den is there, in those rocks!"

But when Milo stood up, he nearly fell again. Seeing him so unsteady, Dik and Djim half-led half-carried him up to the bank of the little stream. With his charge seated against the thick bole of an elderly oak, Dik mindspoke his clansmen to gather squaw-wood, brought steel and stone and tinder from out his belpouch and soon had the dry stuff smoking thickly.

For some time they had been hearing, now and again, the howling of wolves, but such was not an unusual sound either upon high-plains or mountains. In the dead of a hard winter such as this, the packs often joined into super-packs and hunted almost constantly, day and night, small game or big, resting only on those rare occasions that their bellies had a modest quantity of food to work upon.

However, the howls of this pack were becoming louder, and that meant *nearer!* Now and again, gusts of wind bore the excited yelping of wolves on a fresh trail... and no man in the party had the slightest doubt about just whose trail those gaunt, grey demons were on.

Once, long ago, Milo had faced a big wolfpack while afoot, in open country. He had come out of it alive and whole, but more than half the score-or-so of warriors he had started with had not been so lucky, and even those who lived had carried scars of that fearsome battle to their graves.

Milo forced himself erect and set himself to control the shakiness of his legs. "Dik, Djim, the rest of you, this is no fit place to try to fight off Wind knows how many wolves. And we number too few, even were the conditions ideal.

"Now, true, we could each climb a tree and rope ourselves into it, but we could very easily freeze to death, so exposed this coming night, or die of hunger or thirst before those stubborn devils left.

"Djim, you say that the hill ahead is steep. How steep?"

The intuitive tracker sensed his embryonic plan and shook his shaggy, blond head. "Not that steep, Uncle Milo. We won't be able to go up as easily as a cat and the wolves will have even more trouble, but they and we will be able to climb it."

"Then how about the rocks on the summit, Djim?"

The tracker closed his eyes and wrinkled his brow in concentration, then opened them with an incisive nod of his head. "Yes, Uncle Milo, the rocks are all overgrown with vines, but there are places that are almost sheer for seven or eight feet or more near the very top. And that top looks to have a depression in the center, so it may offer some protection from the winds."

The way was steep, very steep, and might have been deadly treacherous in better, warmer weather, but now, at least, the jumbled blackish rocks were frozen into place and only a few shifted under the weights of the climbing men. The sounds from behind spurred their straining muscles to greater efforts. The wolves had reached the stream, now, and were fanning out to find the place the men had come out of the swift-flowing water.

Milo, alone, recognized the rocks up which they frantically scrambled for what they were — much-weathered shards of old asphalt. A hundred years ago this had no doubt been part of a road leading to the hilltop, but five score freezing winters and as many scorching summers had buckled and cracked it. Then, undercut by erosion, the easy, manmade gradient had given way, the fill had washed down to the base of the hillock and left behind the heavier chunks of paving.

Milo led the way, knowing that any rock that would bear his weight would certainly not give under the lighter men who followed him. As he pulled himself over the rim, he heard the triumphant, signalling howl of a wolf, a wolf that had sniffed out their trail. Now, bare seconds were precious as rubles.

Djim Linsee was the next to clamber onto the level ground and, between them, he and Milo grasped the arms of each of the others as they came into reach and pulled them up by main strength, bidding them run for the stone ruin — for such Milo could see it to be — some eighty yards across the tiny mesa. But even as they raised the last man, Dik Esmith, the first of the wolves ran snarling to the foot of the incline, there to rear onto his hind legs and voice his savage view-halloo.

Djim snatched up a loose piece of stone as big as his two fists and hurled it with all his wiry strength and with deadly accuracy. His narrow skull shattered, the big dog-wolf fell

without even a whimper, to lie twitching below them. But his last howl had been heard and understood. An increasing chorus of wolf-sounds told Milo and Djim of the grey death coming on as fast as the hunger-driven beasts could run.

IN HER DEN, full of deer meat and languidly laving her kittens with her wide, red tongue, having to hold the squirming bundles of soft fur down with her good forepaw, The Hunter had heard the wolves afar off, long before the less sensitive ears of the two-legs could have been aware of the huge pack.

But The Hunter knew herself to be safe, even should the pack ascend the hill. Even with an injured forepaw, the big cat realized that she was more than a match for any one wolf, and no more than one wolf at a time could crawl into the narrow, winding passage that led to this den. Too, her eyes were better adapted to the near-total darkness that prevailed beyond the first couple of turns of the passage.

Three winters ago, she and her now-dead mate had lazily taken turns at killing wolves starving or crazed enough to enter the confines of that passage. As many had they killed as she had claws on her forepaws, and as fast as the cats' mighty buffets crushed skulls or snapped necks, as fast as their long fangs tore out throats, so fast did others of the pack drag out their dead or dying fellows to tear them apart in an orgy of lupine cannibalism.

At last, though, the edges of their hunger slightly dulled by their grisly repast, the pack had trotted off to seek out less dangerous prey. And The Hunter, gently swishing her long, thick tail and watching the kittens' wobbling stalks and bumbling leaps at the tailtip with a critical, maternal eye, knew that she was still capable of defending herself and her young from any number of wolves.

THE BUILDING that was now become but ruin had been fashioned of bricks and rough-hewn blocks of granite. Milo could see no clues to what had caused the collapse of the structure, but he was not really looking. Djim and another extraordinarily agile man had somehow gotten atop the almost-smooth, almost-vertical eight-foot-plus wall and Milo was now using his prodigious strength to lift the other four, one by

one, holding them at arms' length over his head, that those above might drag them up.

The wolfpack was howling and yelping below the hill. A few had already scrambled up the difficult ascent and were even now racing flat out toward the ruin, howling back the message that the quarry were in sight.

The last horseclansman raised and safe on high, Milo stepped back a couple of paces and leaped upward, his arms stretched toward the hands that reached for him. But his legs failed to deliver their usual power and even collapsed under him as he fell back, sending him tumbling down to the very foot of the ruin.

Only fifty feet distant was the nearest wolf — its red tongue lolling over its cruel, white fangs, short spurts of mist jetting from its nostrils, and pure murder shining from yellow eyes.

Milo fought back onto his feet and retraced his way to the foot of the sheer wall. Even as he reached it and grasped the joined belts the horseclansmen had lowered, he could hear the claws of the big wolf clicking on exposed surfaces of the ruin. The animal's panting sounded unbelievably loud and Milo even imagined that he could feel the hot, dank breath on the back of his neck.

As the horseclansmen drew him up, he freed his right hand and drew his saber, for he sensed himself rising very slowly, too slowly. His head and shoulders already were above the upper edge of the ruin when the wolf arrived where he had been. Without any discernable pause, the ravenous beast jumped high, jaws agape.

The wolf's first jump missed, but then so did the swing of Milo's saber. On the second jump, the slaving jaws brushed Milo's bootsole, but his keep-edged saber took off the most of one furry ear and, with the surprised yelp of a kicked dog, the wolf fell back. The determined animal essayed one more leap but, by then, Milo's legs were disappearing over the top edge of the ruin.

They were safe for the moment, but as more and more grey shapes debouched onto the mesa, it became more and evermore clear that their situation was distinctly unenviable.

The wall up which they had come was the lowest side of the tower, so they were at least safe from wolves, so long as they

stayed on high. However, although the tovertop was slightly concave, the floor was only bare inches below the jagged rim, offering no trace of protection from wind, which, judging from the rime of ice and lack of snow, must be vicious and biting here, so high.

Nor was there anything burnable. While each of the men carried a few ounces of fatty pemmican in his belt-pouch, none had more than enough for one full day. Moreover, none of them had brought water bottles, knowing that they could slake their thirst with snow, but this eyrie was bare of snow.

Husbanding their bare dozen arrows against greater need, the horseclansmen used their big, heavy-bladed dirks to work loose jagged chunks of granite and weatherworn bricks, then they and Milo spent the rest of the waning daylight teaching the wolves to keep a respectable distance from the tower.

Horseclansmen were ever prone to gambling, they would wager on anything and Uncle Milo was asked to bear witness to numerous bets while the supply of missiles lasted — cattle, weapons, old bits of gaudy loot, even women and horses. At least a dozen wolves were either killed outright or so badly crippled that they could not flee or fight off the packmates that savaged them and devoured their sometimes-living flesh.

The night was terrible. Rolling pebbles in their mouths to allay their thirst, the nomads laced their hoods tightly and drew the woolen blizzard-masks up over lips and vulnerable noses. In the very center of the concavity, they huddled together for warmth, frequently changing position that all might have equal time in the warmer, centermost position.

Not that sleep was easy, for the wolves paced and howled, snuffled and barked and yelped throughout the long, dark night. Wolf after wolf set himself at the sheer walls, jumping and falling back to jump again until exhaustion claimed them. The pack seemed driven mad by the smell of so much manflesh and blood, so near yet so unattainable to them.

Light came at last, but there was no visible sun and no cessation of the biting wind. The signs were unmistakable, a blizzard was building up. Milo knew that, were he and his men to survive the coming weather, they must get off this exposed pinnacle and

into shelter of some kind. But how?

The wolves paced the length and breadth of the little mesa, they numbered at least three score, possibly more — grey wolves and those of a dirty-brown color, with here and there a black one. Milo could almost feel pity for the canines for they were obviously starving, with ribs clearly visible beneath the dull, matted coats.

The pack had lost their fear of hurled stones in the night and once more were ranging close about the tower. But the men soon discovered that there were few loose rocks remaining on the rims, only in the center where their combined body-heat had thawed the rubble to a degree could they pry up broken bricks and shards of grey granite:

With the supply of rocks decreasing, Milo awarded such as were available to the four most accurate hurlers — Dik, Djim and the tracker's two younger brothers; fiery-haired twins called Bill and Bahb. Milo and the other horseclansmen set themselves and their dirks to worrying loose more of the bits and pieces of old masonry littering the center of the tower.

Milo thrust his dirk-blade under a brick that looked to be almost whole . . . and felt his blade ring on metal! Setting the other men to working upon the same area, slowly, a pitted red-brown iron ring was exposed and, shortly, they had cleared the two-foot-square trapdoor in which the ring was set.

One of the horseclansmen took a grip upon the ring and heaved, then grasped it afresh with both hands, gritted his teeth and strained until the throbbing veins bulged in his forehead, but the rust-streaked door never budged.

"Wait," counseled Milo, "there may be a catch of some kind holding it shut." His dirk-blade proved too wide for the crack at the edge closest to the ring, so too was the blade of his skinning knife. But the blade of the small dagger he habitually carried in his boot-top slipped easily in. Even with the center of the ring, the blade encountered an obstruction; while pushing the knife against the unseen object, Milo noted that the ring turned a millimeter or so. Maintaining knife pressure, he gripped the ring in his other hand and twisted it right, then left, then right again. At the last twist, the obstruction was gone, the blade slid easily from corner to corner of the door.

"Try it now."

The horseclansman heaved. There was momentary resistance, then, with an unearthly squeal and a shower of rust, the door rose jerkily upward to disclose the first treads of what looked to Milo like a steel stairway, covered with dust and cobwebs.

When the nomad's belts were once more formed into a makeshift rope and knotted to the back of his own belt, Milo gingerly set foot to the ancient stairs, saber slung on his back and big dirk ready in his hand. As the horseclansmen watched, all huddled about the opening into the unknown, Milo disappeared into the darkness, only the ring of his bootsoles on the metal telling them that he still was descending.

A SUDDEN intensification of the hot lancing pain in her left foreleg awakened The Hunter, that and a thirst that was raging. Arising, she hobbled across the high-ceilinged, airy den to lap avidly at the pool in one corner — a pool that never froze even in the worst of winters and that never had been dry in even the most arid of summers.

Her thirst quenched in the crackling-cold water, The Hunter hobbled back to her guard-post by the mouth of the tunnel. Lying down, once more, for she seemed utterly devoid of energy, she licked at her swollen, throbbing left foreleg. Even the gentle touch of her tongue sent bolts of burning agony through every fiber of her being . . . and, of course, that was when she heard the first wolf enter the tunnel.

The Hunter had been aware that the two-legs were upon the high, flat place, where birds nested in warmer times and where she and her now-dead mate had right often sunned themselves. But because she did know the place so well, she knew that there was no danger of the two-legs getting from there to the den. And if the wolves could find a way to get to the two-legs and wanted to eat them, they were more than welcome. As for her, she had nearly gagged at the foul stench of that two-leg she had so easily killed on the preceding day.

When the clawclicks and shufflings told her that the lupine invader was past the first turn of the passage, she entered it herself, putting as little weight as possible upon her strangely-huge and very tender left foreleg.

They met between the first turn and the second, in a section too low-ceilinged for

either to stand fully erect. The Hunter knew that she possessed the deadly advantage, here, for with only toothy jaws for weapons, the wolf could only lunge for her throat, whereas a single blow of her claw-studded forepaw could smash the life from him as quickly as she had killed that two-leg. But she reckoned without her disability.

Sensing more than seeing the location of the wolf's head, she lashed out with her sound paw... but this suddenly transferred the full weight of her head and forequarters onto the hot, swollen left foreleg. Squalling with pain, she stumbled and her buffet failed to strike home, the bared claws only raked the wolf's head and mask and, before she could recover, his crushing jaws had closed upon her one good foreleg, eyeteeth stabbing, carnassials scissoring flesh and cracking bone.

But before the wolf could raise his bloody head, The Hunter had closed, had sunk her own huge fangs into the sinewy neck and crushed the lupine spine.

As the wolf's jaws relaxed in death, The Hunter slowly backed down the tunnel, dragging her two useless forepaws, growling deep in her throat as the waves of pain washed over her. Weak and growing weaker, she tumbled the two foot drop from tunnel-mouth to den-floor.

Two of the kittens, trailed by the third, bounced merrily over to her, but a growled command sent them scurrying back into a far, dark corner. The Hunter knew that she and they were doomed, now. She might have enough strength remaining to kill with her fangs the next wolf that came out of the tunnel. But there would be another behind him, and another and another and the one she proved too weak to kill would kill her. Then the pack would be at the helpless kittens, ripping the little bodies to shreds, eating them alive.

Deciding to guard her young as long as possible, The Hunter painfully dragged herself across the den and took her death-stand before them.

THE STEEL staircase was spiral and, though it trembled and creaked and cracked under his weight, Milo made it safely to the bottom. Untying the belts from his own, he mindspoke the men above him.

"The stairs will hold you, but don't come down yet. This room seems small. See if

that door will open wider, then get back from it. It's dark as pitch, down here."

The hinges screamed like a damned soul, but finally the horseclansmen got the trapdoor almost flat on the roof. In the increased light, Milo could see that the chamber was, indeed, small, a bit smaller than the roof, above. Every surface was covered with a century of dust and hung with a hundred years' worth of cobwebs. But he could spot no droppings of any kind, so apparently no animal or bird had ever gained access to it.

It took him a moment to remember just what the dust-shrouded object sitting on a shelf at waist-level was: It was a gasoline lantern.

"I wonder..." brushing away the dust and cobwebs, he could see that the artifact was not rusted, being finished in chrome or stainless steel, too, the glass was intact and there was even a filament still in place. Lifting the object, he shook it beside his ear. It sloshed almost full and if that liquid was gasoline...?

Finding the handle of the air-pump, he tried it, the shaft moved smoothly in its tube. Now, if he just had a match?

He let his fingers wander the length of the shelf. Near the edge they encountered a small, metal cylinder. Not daring to hope, Milo brought his new find into the light. It was badly rusted and it was all that he could do to coax the screw-top loose.

"Son of a bitch." He breathed, softly. The cylinder was filled with wooden matches, the heads each coated with wax.

With the trapdoor closed and seven bodies gathered in close quarters, the nomads soon ceased to shiver and exclaimed upon the clear, intensely-bright light of the lantern. A lighted exploration discovered another, larger lantern, two corroded and useless flashlights, a two-gallon can of lantern-fuel, an assortment of rusty machine tools and a holstered revolver, now just a single lump of rusty metal.

There was one other find. Set in the concrete floor near the foot of the stairs was another trapdoor, about three feet by two. Milo filled and lit the larger lantern, took the smaller for himself, then opened the second trapdoor to disclose more steel stairs, but these looking to be in better condition.

"Dik, Djim, you and the men stay here. I'll mindcall if I need you or when I find food or water. Leave that thing in the leather

holder alone. It was once a dangerous weapon and still might hurt or kill one of you if you tinker with it."

The floor at the bottom of the second spiral stairs was also concrete, but it had once been covered with asphalt tile, which cracked and powdered under Milo's boots. To his left, grown over with plant roots, was a jumble of brick and stone and Milo guessed that he was probably within the main ruin, whereon the tower sat perched.

Behind and to his right were plain, sound brick walls, still partially covered with remnants of rotted wood panelling. More of the rotted wood framed the door ahead of him, its brass knob pale-green with verdigris. The knob turned stiffly in his hand, but the door remained closed. Setting the light on the stairs, he put both hands to the task. Something popped and the door swung open.

The door led into a small, narrow room, the left side of it lined with closed metal cabinets, the right taken up by a flight of concrete stairs leading down. All of the cabinets proved bare of much that was still useable — a few brass buckles, a handful of metal buttons, perhaps the nails and eyelets could be salvaged from the several pairs of rotting boots by the metal-thrifty horseclansmen.

As he opened the last cabinet, he jumped back and cursed at unexpected movement, his hand going to the hilt of his dirk. The big, brown rat struck the floor running and scuttled down the steps, only to come back up twice as fast, shrieking in terror and streaking directly between Milo's feet to leap into a hold in the wall.

Thus warned, Milo descended the stairs slowly and carefully, holding the lantern high. It was well that he had done so. The bare concrete of the small room below was littered with nearly two dozen sluggishly-writhing rattlesnakes!

Well, thought Milo, that answers the food problem. But none of the vipers lay between the foot of the stairs and the closed door in the facing wall, so he left them alone.

This door was the hardest to open he had encountered, but at last he did so, to find himself faced with a short stretch of corridor and three more doors, one in each wall. He entered and closed the door behind him.

The doors to both left and right were secured with heavy padlocks. Stencilled on

the face of the left door was "FALLOUT SHELTER — KEEP OUT — THIS MEANS YOU!" On the face of the right was, "PRIVATE SANCTUM OF STATION DIRECTOR — TRESPASSERS WILL BE BRUTALLY VIOLATED!" The door straight ahead was unmarked, but an iron bar at least two inches thick horizontally bisected it, held in U-shaped brackets firmly bolted to the brickwork.

It might well be a door opening to outside. Milo put an ear to it but could hear nothing. Removing the bar, he opened the door a crack, keeping shoulder and foot against it, just in case a wolf should try to come calling.

But stygian darkness lay beyond the door. Darkness and a powerful odor of cat. Milo closed the door and drew his saber, then opened it wide and quickly descended the two steps to the next level, lantern held above his head and eyes rapidly scanning the large, high room.

THE HUNTER tried to raise herself when the two-leg holding in his paw a small, white sun opened a part of the den-wall and came in, but she was too weak to do more than growl.

Milo let his saber sag down from the guard position, the big cat was clearly as helpless as the kittens bunched behind her body. One foreleg was grotesquely swollen, obviously infected or abscessed, the other was torn, bleeding and looked to be broken, as well.

There was a flicker of movement to his right and he spun just in time to see the slavering jaws and smouldering eyes of a wolf's head emerge from a hole just above the floor. In two quick strides, he crossed the room and his well-honed saber blade swept up, then down, severing the wolf's neck cleanly.

But the headless, blood-spouting body still came forth from the hole and, as it tumbled to kick and twitch beside its still grinning head, another head came into view, this one living and snarling at the man who-faced him.

Milo thrust his point between the gaping jaws. Teeth snapped and splintered on the fine steel and the point grated briefly on bone, then sliced free. Milo jerked the steel out. . . but the dying wolf came with it, and behind him, crouched another!

He split the skull of the third wolf, but

even as its blood and brains oozed out, another was pushing the body out into the den.

This, thought Milo, could conceivably go on forever!

But, as the lifeless fifth wolf was being slowly pushed through, Milo suddenly became aware of the rectangular regularity of the opening. Man-made! And men would surely have had a means of closing it.

And there it was! Half-hidden in a camouflage of dust and dirt, a sliding door, set between metal runners on the wall above the opening. But did it still function?

In the precious moments between butchering wolves, Milo pulled and tugged at the door. Setting the lantern down, he drew his dirk with his left hand and used its point to dig bits of debris from out the grooves of the runners. Clenching the dirk between his teeth, he hung his full weight from the door-handle... and it *moved*!

Another wolf, this one a huge, black beast. He chuckled to himself, thinking, "The Chinese used to say that you should never be cruel to a black dog that appeared at your door. 'Well, hell, I wasn't cruel to the bastard. I gave him a quicker, cleaner death than he'd have given me.'"

The black wolf had been in better flesh than most of his packmates, so it took the one behind a few seconds longer to push the jerking body out of the tunnel. And that few extra seconds' respite made all the difference. With all Milo's hundred-eighty pounds suspended from it, the ancient door inched downward slowly, then, screeching like a banshee, faster. Finally, it slammed and latched itself in the very face of the next wolf, which yelped its surprise.

"Dik, Djim, the rest of you," Milo mind-called, "take up the lantern, carry it as you saw me carry this one and be careful you don't drop it or strike it against something. Come the way I came." He opened his memory of the stairs and passages to them. "Be careful at the bottom of those stone stairs, a nest of rattlesnakes are denned on the floor there. Those with a taste for snakemeat can kill them. But any who want wolf-steaks need only come in here and skin and gut their choice of ten or twelve of them, fresh killed. Oh, and there's water here too, I can hear it dripping."

Then, an intensely powerful mindspeak drowned out any reply the horseclansmen

might have beamed. "What are you, two-legs? You carry a small sun in your hands, you slay many wolves to protect kittens not your own, you can open walls and close them, and you can speak the language of Cats. *What are you?*?"

THE HUNTER could no longer trust the witness of her eyes. At times they seemed clouded with a dark mist, at others she saw the images of three or four identical two-legs and as many of the little, bright suns. Therefore, when first she sensed him beaming the silent language, she thought that others of her perceptions were awry; as well. But, at length, she beamed a question... and he answered her!

He just stood and stared at her for a moment, then, very slowly, he laid down his long, blood-dripping claw beside the little sun and took a few steps closer to her, extending one empty paw.

"You are badly hurt, Sister. Will you bite me if I try to help you?"

The sight of him faded into the dark mist, but his message still came into her mind. "Help this Cat? Why would you want to help this Cat. This Cat killed one of your pack last sun. Two-legs do not help Cats, they slay Cats, just as you slew those wolves."

He answered, "Wolves are enemies of us both, Sister. Besides my brothers and I are hungry."

"You would eat *wolves*?" The repugnance in her thought-beam was clear.

He moved his head up and down for some reason. "Hunger can make any meat taste good, Sister."

All of The Hunter's life had been hard and she could grasp the truth stated by this two-leg. Perhaps he then was truthful about wanting to help her. "If this Cat allows you to come close, what will you do, two-leg?"

"The bleeding of your right leg must be stopped, the wound cleaned and packed with healing herbs and wrapped with cloth... uh, something like soft skins... then the broken bones must be pulled straight and tied in place to heal. It will hurt, Sister, and you must promise to not bite us in your pain."

"Us?"

"Yes, Sister, one of my brothers must help me, he is skilled in caring for wounds and injuries." To himself, Milo thanked his lucky stars that chance had sent Fil Linsee

with him. The young man was well on the way to becoming a first-rate horse-leech, and was certain to have a packet of herbs and salves and bandages somewhere on his person.

"Does your brother, too, speak the language of Cats?" The Hunter asked. She was feeling very strange, much weaker, it was now all that she could do to keep her big head up.

The Hunter half sensed an answer from the two-leg, but it was unclear. Suddenly, nothing was clear for her. The dark mist closed in, thicker and darker. A great waterfall seemed to be roaring about her. Then there was nothing.

As it was, Fil was the first man through the door, his long spear in one hand and the tails of a couple of thick-bodied, headless snakes writhing in the other. At sight of the unconscious cat, he dropped the snakes and grasped his spear-shaft in both hands, bringing the point to bear.

But Milo waved at the spear. "You won't need that, with luck, Fil. That cat can mind-speak. We were having quite a conversation before she passed out. We . . . you . . . are going to do what is necessary to heal up those forelegs. Do you think a cat will be much different from a horse?"

Fil came into the den and eyed the injured feline while keeping a safe distance from her, with his spear-shaft between them. After sucking on his long, lower lip for a while, he said, "Uncle Milo, that cat must weigh over two hundred pounds, for all she's not really well-fed. That near foreleg will be tender as a boil, and it needs draining, which means cutting it in two, maybe three, places. I value my life and my skin, Uncle Milo. I won't touch the cat unless she's well and firmly tied. She's bound to be too strong for even six warriors to hold for long."

Reflecting that the man was likely right, Milo thought hard. There was no rope in this party, and seven belts just wouldn't do this job. Maybe, he thought, behind one of those two locked doors. . . ?

A swift succession of short, heavy blows of the iron rod not only smashed the padlock but ripped loose the hasp as well. And Milo entered the door marked "FALLOUT SHELTER."

The room was a treasure trove — jerrycans of fuels, boxes of canned goods, several locked footlockers, a couple of ax-

es, a longhandled spade, a pickaxe and a wrecking-bar, all metal surfaces smeared with cosmoline and looking as if they just had been brought from the hardware store. The room was dry and there was almost no dust, as the door had been tightfitting and weatherstripped, with a raised sill. There was an identical door in the opposite wall, but Milo postponed exploring what lay behind it, for what he now most needed was in the first footlocker he opened, several coils of strong, manila rope, plus an assortment of buckle-fitted webbing straps.

Bearing their ropes and straps, Milo, Fil, Dik and Djim filed into the den and bore down on the comatose cat. But, suddenly, there was a fearsome, if high-pitched growl and a kitten — probably weighing all of twenty-five pounds — stalked purposefully from behind his mother. Fur and whiskers bristling, ears folded back against his diminutive head, lips curled up off white little teeth, the kitten took his stand, tail swishing his anger and fierce resolve.

Milo received the silent warning, "Two-legs keep away from Mother or this Cat kills!"

The other horseclansmen perceived the thought-transmission as well and stop they did, grinning and nodding admiration of such natural courage and reckless daring in defense of kin.

"Uncle Milo," said Dik, soberly, "if that cub had two legs instead of four, I'd sponsor him to my chief. It's clear he's a horseclansman, born."

Handing his coil of rope to another, Milo slowly approached the little warrior. Squatting out of range of a pounce, he hoped, he mindspoke the hissing kitten. At the same time, on another level of his mind, he broadbeamed soothing assurance, having noticed that such worked with horses.

"How is my Cat-Brother called?"

The kitten did not alter his position and he eyed Milo distrustfully. When he decided to answer, it was with open hostility. "This Cat is Killer-of-Two-legs. Keep away or you all die!"

Dik slapped his thigh and guffawed. "Listen to him! What a warrior he'd be. Facing down four full-grown, armed men, and him but a cub."

Milo spoke aloud. "Don't underestimate him, Dik. Smaller than his mother, yes, but he's near as big as a grown bobcat and I'll wager he could put some pretty furrows in

your hide, if given the chance."

Then he added, "But we won't give him that chance, I hope. Two of you take off your jackets and hand me one, *slowly*, then get some of that rope ready. I could argue all day with this obstinate little bugger, and his mother will soon die without help."

With moving men to either side distracting his attention, Milo was able to flip the heavy coat over the kitten. And then it was a furious matter of grab and tussle, but finally the raging, squalling little beastlet was securely wrapped in two thick, leather garments and wrapped about with several yards of rope. The other two kittens had retreated into a far, dark corner.

First Fil cleaned the wolf-bite and smeared it thickly with salve, then he adroitly set and splinted the broken leg, using part of his own embroidered shirt when he ran out of bandage-cloths. But when he first began to shave the infected leg with the razor-keen skinning-knife, the huge cat came to full and furious consciousness, straining at the ropes and straps pinioning her rear legs and fearsome jaws, growling between clenched teeth.

Milo tried to reach her mind, but it was useless. As well as he could, Fil went on about his shaving of the long fur. Gently as possible, his sensitive fingers roved over the grossly-swollen leg. He rubbed a portion of the discolored skin with a few drops of liquid from a small, metal bottle, then dipped the short blade of a slender knife into the bottle.

At the first touch of the needlepointed knife, the big cat squalled, heaved her heavy body once, then unconsciousness claimed her once more.

Fil had had the experience to keep clear, but the curious Djim caught the jet of foul, greenish pus that erupted around the first thrust of the little knife full in the face. Cursing sulphurously, he stood up and headed for the water-pool.

Fil opened a long gash and cut through to the bone, then pressed upon the leg until nothing but blood and clear serum flowed. He packed the open wound with dried herbs, smeared its gaping edges with salve and banded the limb with more of his shirt. After feeling the neck-pulse to ascertain if his patient still lived, he gathered his instruments and trudged wearily toward the pool.

After the straining men had manhandled the limp form of the cat back to where she had been originally lying and had untied her rear legs, Fil Esmith took up the watch over his patient, squatting near her with the thrashing shape of a decapitated rattler before him, gobbling raw filets of snake as fast as his busy knife could skin, clean and slice them. Across the den, the red-haired Linsee twins were joking and chortling as they lugged bloody wolf carcasses up to the roof of the tower for skinning whenever the blizzard died down.

In one end of what had been the snake-den, Djim Linsee squatted, kitten-sitting. Killer-of-Two-legs had not been released, as he had hotly refused to tender his parole. The furious and frustrated little beast was managing to somehow roll his ropebound leather cocoon over and over from one side of the room to the other, alternately squalling for maternal assistance and beaming silent threats of dire and deadly retribution against every two-leg he had seen.

On the other hand, Djim had gained at least the conditional friendship and partial trust of the two, smaller and less pugnacious, female kittens. The fuzzy little creatures were mindspeaking less and less guardedly as they avidly devoured his lavish gifts of snakemeat.

MILO HAD found the inner door of the fallout-shelter unlocked, though every crack had been sealed with wide strips of tape. Sealant removed, the door had opened easily to reveal a virtual efficiency-apartment — two double-decker bunks, a chemical toilet, a two-burner petrol range, a stainless steel sink with chrome pump in place of faucets and a plethora of cabinets and drawers of various sizes and shapes covering every available inch of wall-space.

After going through the contents of a few of the cabinets, some of the worry about their situation left Milo's mind. Even if the blizzard, now howling in full force, should last a month and the huge wolfpack should maintain their selge until spring, he and the horseclansmen would be well-fed on the big sealed cans of powdered milk and eggs and orange concentrate, the stack upon high stack of freeze-dried foods still sealed in their plastic-lined foil pouches. There were jars of coffee (he tried but could not recall the last time he had tasted real coffee, though the nomads all drank certain

bastard brews they invariably called "coffee") and sugar and jams, tins of tea, even a case of Jerez Brandy. Ano 1972, plus a wide assortment of condiments and pickles.

Under one of the lower bunks was a flat steel chest, its lid padlocked and sealed with tape. The lock yielded to a few strokes of the iron bar. Within, the first thing that caught Milo's eyes was a finely-tooled leather case about four feet long.

Nape-hairs prickling, he lifted the case to the bunk and unsnapped its catches, then lifted the lid. Nestled on a bed of impregnated sheepskin lay a scope-sighted sporting rifle, blued barrel, chrome bolt-handle and polished stock reflecting back the light of the lantern. Arrayed below the barrel were six brightly colored boxes, each labeled, "REMINGTON .30-06 Sprgfd. 180 gr. pointed soft point 20 rounds."

With shaking hands, Milo lifted the beautiful weapon from its century-old bed and first lifted then pulled the silvery bolt handle. The ancient Mauser action slid smoothly open and the ejector sent a bright, brass dummy cartridge clattering across the room. The visible interior surfaces of the rifle gleamed as brightly as the exterior.

Milo slouched back against the cabinet behind him, a grim smile on his face. Six boxes, twenty rounds the box, one hundred and twenty cartridges, then; even if it took him a full box to reorient himself to a firearm and to zero this one in, he'd still have more than enough to seriously deplete the wolf-population, hereabouts, so they were now only trapped here until the weather improved.

But what about the cat? Even with the wolves dead or departed, she would be in a bad way. Unable to hunt for at least a month, she and those kittens would be white bones, soon. True, he and the horse-clansmen could leave meat behind for her, but how long before it was all eaten or became inedible?

Take them back with us? For the kittens, that would work fine, strap one each on the backs of three men. But how in the devil do seven men get a two hundred and some pound injured cat down a bitch of an almost vertical hill, coated with ice and full of loose rocks?

What we should do is just loll about here until the big cat is mended, then give her

the choice of coming with us or staying here, but if I keep these men away that long, their clans will think they're all dead and, likely, move the camp to a luckier place, probably in the very direction we won't go.

Now if it only weren't for that damned hill, we could just build a sledge and . . .

Fil's mindcall interrupted him. "Uncle Milo, the big cat is waking up."

When Milo strode into the den, Fil Esmith, Bili and Bahb Linsee were watching the groggy beast, made clumsy by her bandaged forepaws, trying to get a hind claw under the strap still securing her jaws.

Milo moved to her side and squatted, laying a hand on her head — he had long-ago learned that physical contact always improved telepathic communication — he mindspoke her.

"Sister, I'll take the straps off. But you must promise not to tear off the little skins covering your legs with your teeth. Will you?"

THE BLIZZARD blew for three days, but the wind began to die during the third night, and morning brought a full blaze of sun in a blue sky. It also brought back the wolves, which had shrewdly left the exposed mesa during the blow. Bili and Bahb, who were atop the tower, working on the frozen carcasses with their skinning-knives, mindcalled Milo as the first grey predators moved out across the frozen surface of the deep snow.

Carrying the cased rifle and a folded tarp, Milo climbed back up onto the tower roof. He had been classed an expert rifleman in both the armies with which he could remember having served and, during the long blizzard days, he had read and reread the booklet that the Browning Arms Company had packed with the weapon, then stripped it, cleaned it and dry-fired it until he thought he knew all he could learn without putting a few live rounds through the mirror-bright bore.

Lacking the sandbags he recalled, he steadied the rifle on a tarp-covered dead and frozen wolf, opened the first box of cartridges and filled the magazine, then settled himself to wait until the maximum number of furry targets were in sight on the mesa.

The pack must not have found much is any game during the blizzard, for soon most of them were gathered about the tower,

engaged in a snapping, snarling battle royal over the skinned carcasses the Linsee boys dropped over as soon as the pelts were off. But a few wolves still were sitting or ambling at some distance from the tower, so Milo decided to sight-in the rifle.

Far down, near the distant edge of the mesa, sat two wolves, intently observing something in the forest below. Milo centered the crosshairs of the scope on the nearer one's head and slowly squeezed off the first round.

The butt slammed his shoulder with a force and violence he had half-forgotten. Below the tower, the wolfpack members were streaming off in every direction, yelping, howling, tails tucked between legs, looking back as they ran with wide and fear-filled eyes. But Milo did not notice, so intent was he on checking the performance of the rifle, which had thrown a good ten feet short of target and well to the left.

The two distant wolves had looked around at the noise, but as they never had been hunted with firearms, they failed to connect the noise with the small something that had drilled through the frozen crust, may not even have been aware of that small something, since it had arrived ahead of the noise.

Milo chambered a fresh round, then adjusted the scope and resettled himself behind it. The second round sizzled out of the barrel. Through the scope, Milo saw his target suddenly duck down, then shake his head, and raise his muzzle skyward, looking about above him.

Again he adjusted the scope. The eighth round sent the target wolf leaping high into the air, to fall and lie jerking on the snow. The other wolf still was sniffing at his fallen packmate, when a 180-grain softpoint ended his curiosity forever.

Milo had had the tower top to himself for some time. The Linsee boys had descended the rickety stairs shaking their ringing heads and wondering how even Uncle Milo could stand those incredibly loud noises.

In a way, Milo felt sorry for the pack of merciless killers, they had no idea who or what was killing them. The loud reports kept them well-away from the tower, which simply made it easier to shoot them with the long-range weapon. Milo tried hard to make each of his kills clean and the tremendous shocking power of the mushrooming bullets helped. He never knew how many

wolves got away, if any, but he only stopped firing when there were no more targets.

When he stood up, finally, and surveyed the slaughter he had wrought, he felt a little sick. Of all animals, he had always most admired wolves and the great cats. Sight of the tumbled, furry bodies and thought of the fierce vitality his skill had snuffed out so effortlessly, pricked his conscience.

But the horseclansmen did not share his anachronistic squeamishness, when once they filed out upon the roof and saw the windfall. Whooping, they lowered themselves down the walls and ran to the closest dead wolves, skinning-knives out. Winter wolf-pelts were warm and valuable. They would become wealthy men at the next summer's tribe-council, trading pelts for cattle, sheep, concubines and inanimate treasures.

By the fourth day after the blizzard had ended, the deer carcass was long since but gnawed bones and the snakes, curing skins; the cat and her kittens had lapped up almost all the powdered milk Milo had mixed and set before them, so he took Djim and Dik down into the forest to seek edible game.

Four big hares were, however, all that the hunters had to show for over three hours' stalking, when Djim's keen eyes picked out a large animal moving among the thick, snow-heavy brush. Alerted by mindspeak, Milo had raised the rifle and almost loosed off the round before the scope told him just what the animal was. Pursing his lips, he whistled the horse-call of the clans, and the chestnut broke off her browsing to come trotting out of the scrub.

Milo put out a hand toward the mare, but she shied away, going instead to Dik and nuzzling against his chest.

Smiling and patting the shaggy neck, he said, "Why, this is my hunter, Swiftwater, Uncle Milo. But I left her back with the other horses, in that deer park."

"Then it's a wonder she hasn't been wolf meat," commented Djim Linsee, laconically. "I figure most of our horses are."

Dik hugged the mare's fine head to him. "Well, she won't have to fear that, now. I'll take care of my good girl."

"Then we'll have to make you a tent down here in the woods," said Djim, bluntly, "cause it ain't no way you're going to get a horse up on that mesa, Dik."

Dik set his jaw stubbornly. "I'm not going

to leave her alone, down here."

Milo nodded. "No, you're not. You're going to fork her right now and ride back to the camp. Her fortuitous arrival changes the complexion of things. You've got your bow and your dirk, here," he unsnapped his saber, "take this. Djim, give him your spear, too.

"Dik, Fil says that the big cat may never fully recover her strength in those forepaws. I'm going to persuade her to come back to camp with us, her and the kittens."

Neither horseclansman evinced any surprise at the intent, for both had "chatted" often with the crippled cat and Djim was now a virtual parent and frequent companion to all three kittens. To their minds, the four cats were human, anatomical differences notwithstanding.

Milo continued, "Dik, tell the chiefs of all we have found and done, here. Tell them to come with a large party, plenty of spare horses. We'll strip the ruin, up there, of anything we can use. Then too," he grinned, "you won't want to leave any of your wolf-pelts or snakehides behind. Tell the chiefs to hurry, Dik. Esmith and Linsee will be very wealthy clans, by the time they leave this winter's camp."

"It'll take them at least a week to get around to getting here," thought Milo as he and Djim continued the hunt. "They wouldn't be horseclansmen if they didn't spend a couple of days and nights discussing the matter, then two or three more days arguing about how to divide booty that they don't yet have in camp. Then they'll take at least a day getting organized. Both chiefs and every warrior will insist upon coming, but, in the end, half will stay behind to guard the camp and the herds.

"But maybe the week will give me time to read the rest of the records in that office. What I've found in there so far is damned interesting. Back-breeding then-living animals to produce extinct ones they were descended from wasn't then new, as I recall, the Europeans had reproduced a decent facsimile of the aurochs, that way.

"And that could damn well be the origin of those cats, come to think of it. The only cats I ever heard of with fangs that long were called *sabertooth* cats and they've been extinct in this hemisphere for ten, twenty thousand years. And those huge, longhorned bison, there're more of them

around this part of the country than any other place I can recall; they could easily have originated here."

"Uncle Milo," Djim mindcalled. "Elk dung, fresh, still hot!"

Shortly, the two men came out of the forest into more open terrain. Well ahead, among the stumps verging a beaver-pond, a solitary bull-elk had cleared the deep blanket of snow from off the frozen ground and was pulling up bunches of sere grass. Raising his head with its wide-spreading rack of deadly tines, the beast gazed at the two men without apparent alarm. He had been hunted often by men and now realized that the quarter-mile of distance separating them was far too far for the sticks to travel.

A single shot of the antique hunting rifle dropped the half ton animal, but Milo put another round into the head at close range as a precaution. Bull elk could be highly dangerous adversaries. Then he and Djim set about the skinning and butchering.

"The Hunter," thought Milo, "and her brood should be very happy with elk-meat, and that's good. I want her in a damned jolly mood when I broach the subject of her and them leaving here for good and living with the clans. I think the idea of a steady, reliable and effortless food-supply will appeal to her, so that's one point in favor of my plan. For all her stubbornness, she's highly intelligent — more intelligent than even a dog or a pig, and they're supposed to be the most intelligent four-footed animals — and if you can convince her something's for her own welfare, she'll do what you say — as witness the fact that she hasn't pulled off her bandages once.

"If she's a sport, she's breeding true, because all three of her kittens can mind-speak, too. When she's better, she and I will have to travel around and see if we can locate a mate for her, since she avers that there are more of her kind in this neck of the woods."

When they had arranged the choicer portions of meat into two weighty but manageable packloads, he and Djim dragged the hide, the rest of the meat and the exceptionally fine antlers back to the nearest tall tree and hung them well out of reach of any but the smallest predators and scavengers to be picked up later. Then they set out for the ruin.

Thoroughly convinced of his own

powers of persuasion, Milo chuckled to himself.

"Who knows, in time there may be yet

another horseclan, a four-footed and furry one." ●

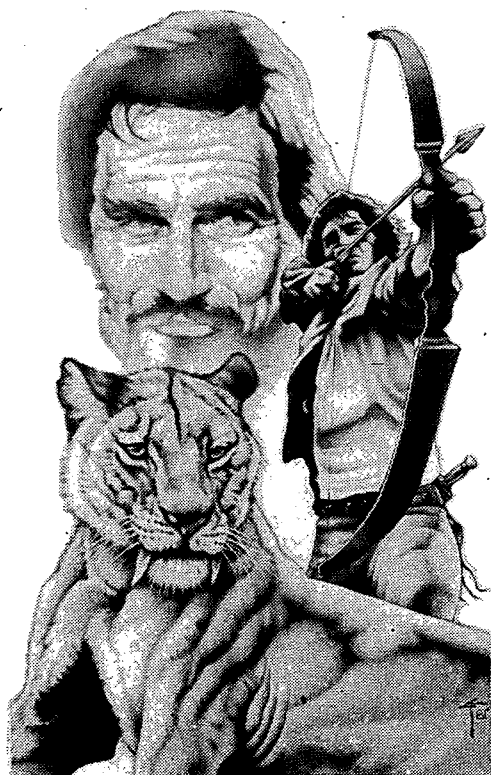
Robert Adams

A native of Danville, Va. Robert Adams now resides in Richmond, Va. His first Horseclans book was published in June '75. There now are seven Horseclans books in print, an eighth is in preparation and two more are contracted to be written. In addition, Mr. Adams is writing the second volume of his new series, Castaways In Time, for Donning/Starblaze Editions.

His scholarship in Ancient and Medieval History, his years of soldiering and the experience gleaned from his hobbies — riding, fencing, metalworking and smithing, archery, hunting and animal-breeding — blend smoothly with his enviable writing talents to produce excep-

tionally realistic and exciting tales. He was early acclaimed a true "writers' writer" by Andre Norton and his status has since been confirmed by such figures as Poul Anderson, Robert Bloch, Phillip Jose Farmer, Frank Kelly Freas, Andrew J. Offutt, Joseph Rosenberger and Dr. Roger Schlobin.

Mr. Adams states that the following tale, "The Hunter," is chronologically the earliest Horseclans segment to date, taking place almost four hundred years prior to The Coming of The Horseclans. He is in process of expanding this story to novel-length, to be published by NAL/Signet Books, Inc. — Ed



**Roger
Zelazny**



**THE
NAKED
MATADOR**

Nice help, if you can get it . . .

Running — waiting, actually — in Key West, I thought of a story I'd read in high school: Hemingway's "The Killers." The appearance of the diner did nothing to change my feelings.

All of the seats at the counter were occupied, except for one on either side of the woman near the middle. I moved to the one at her right.

"This seat taken?" I asked her.

"No," she said, so I sat down.

She wore a beige raincoat, a red and blue scarf completely covering her hair, and large, smoked glasses. It was a cloudy day.

"What's the soup?" I asked her.

"Conch."

I ordered some, and a club sandwich.

She had several cups of coffee. She glanced at her watch. She turned toward me.

"Vacationing?" she asked.

"Sort of," I said.

"Staying near here?"

"Not too far."

She smiled.

"I'll give you a ride."

"All right."

We paid our checks. She was short. About five-two or three. I couldn't really see much of her, except for her legs, and they were good.

We went out and turned left. She headed toward a small white car. I could smell the sea again.

We got in and she began to drive. She didn't ask me where I was staying. She looked at her watch again.

"I'm horny," she said then. "You interested?"

It had been quite awhile, running the way I had been. I nodded as she glanced my way.

"Yeah," I said. "You look good to me."

She drove for a time, then turned down a road toward the beach. It was an isolated stretch. The waves were dark and high and white-capped.

She stopped the car.

"Here?" I said.

She unbuttoned her coat, undid a blue wraparound skirt. She wore nothing beneath it. She left it behind and straddled me.

"The rest is up to you," she said.

I smiled and reached for her glasses. She slapped my hand away.

"Below the neck," she said. "Keep it below the neck."

"All right. Sorry," I said, reaching up beneath her blouse and around behind for snaps. "You really are something."

I was out and up and in before too long. She did most of the work, with very little change of expression, except near the end when she began to smile and threw her head back. A peculiar icy feeling crept along my spine then, and I looked away from her face and down at the rest of her, riding and flapping.

When I was empty and she was full, she got off and rebuttoned her coat, not bothering with the skirt.

"Good," she said, squeezing my left biceps. "I was getting tense."

"I was kind of tight myself," I said, zipping and buckling, as she started the

engine. "You've got a very good body."

"I know."

She got onto the road and headed back.

"Where you staying?"

"Southernmost Motel."

"Okay."

As we drove, I wondered why a girl like that didn't have a steady man. I thought she might be new in town. I thought maybe she didn't want a steady man. I thought it would be nice to see her again. Too bad I was leaving that night.

As we went down my street, I saw a blue car with a man I knew sitting in it, parked in front of my motel. I drew myself down in the seat.

"Go past," I said. "Don't stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"They've found me," I said. "Keep driving."

"The only person I see is a man in a blue Fury. He the one?"

"Yes. He wasn't looking this way. I don't think he saw me."

"He's looking at the motel."

"Good."

She swung around the corner.

"What now?" she said.

"I don't know."

She looked at her watch.

"I have to get home," she said. "I'll take you with me."

"I'd appreciate it."

I stayed low, so I didn't see exactly where she drove. When she finally stopped and turned off the engine and I rose, I saw that we were in a driveway beside a small cottage.

"Come on."

I got out and followed her in. We entered a small, simple living room, a kitchenette off its left end. She headed toward a closed door to the rear.

"There's whisky in the cabinet," she said, gesturing, "wine on the kitchen counter, beer and sodas in the refrigerator. Have yourself a drink if you want. I'm going to be back here awhile."

She opened the door. I saw that it was bathroom. She went in and closed it. Moments later, I could hear water running.

I crossed the room and opened the cabinet. I was nervous. I wished I hadn't quit smoking. I closed the cabinet again. Hard liquor might slow me if trouble came. Besides, I'd rather sip. I went to the kitchen and located a beer. I paced with it for a time and finally settled onto the green sofa next to a casually draped serape. The water was still running.

I thought about what I was going to do. It began to rain lightly. I finished the beer and got another. I looked out of all the windows, even those in the bedroom in the rear to the left, but there was no one in sight. After a time, I wanted to use the bathroom, but she was still in there. I wondered what she was doing for so long.

When she finally came out, she wore a blue terrycloth robe that stopped at mid-calf. Her hair was turbaned in a white towel. She still had on her dark glasses.

She turned on a radio in the kitchen, found music, came back with a glass of wine and seated herself on the sofa.

"All right," she said, "what do you want to do?"

"I'm leaving tonight," I said.

"When?"

"Twoish."

"How?"

"Fishing boat, heading south."

"You can stay here till then. I'll take you to the dock."

"It's not that simple," I said. "I have to get back to my motel."

"What's so important?"

"Some papers. In a big manila envelope. At the bottom of my suitcase."

"Maybe they've got them already."

"Maybe."

"It's very important?"

"Yes."

"Give me the room key. I'll get them for you."

"I'm not asking you to."

"I'll get them. Make yourself at home. Give me the key."

I fished it out and passed it to her. She nodded and walked back to the bedroom. I went to the kitchen and started a pot of coffee. A little later, she emerged wearing a black skirt, a red blouse and a red scarf. Boots. She drew on her raincoat and moved toward the door. I went to her and embraced her, and she laughed and went out into the rain. I heard the car door slam and the engine start. I felt badly about her going, but I wanted the papers very badly.

I went back to the bathroom. A great number of unlabelled jars filled a section of the countertop. Some of them were open. Several had very peculiar odors which I could not classify, some of them smelled vaguely narcotic. There was also a Bunsen burner, tongs, test tubes and several beakers and flasks — all of them recently rinsed.

I was not certain what I would do if someone followed her back. I felt like a naked matador without a sword. They had been after me for a long while, and there had been many passes. I was not carrying a gun. I had had to go through too many airline security checks recently, and I had not had time to obtain one locally. If I could just make the boat everything would be all right.

I went to the kitchen to check on the coffee. It was ready. I poured a cup and sat to drink it at the table. I listened to the rain.

Perhaps half an hour later, I heard a car in the driveway. I went to the window. It was hers and she appeared to be alone in it.

When she came in, she withdrew the envelope from beneath her coat and handed it to me. She gave me back the key, too.

"Better check and be sure the right stuff is still there," she said.

I did, and it was.

"Think they knew which room?" she asked.

"I don't know. They wouldn't recognize the name. Did he see you go in? Come out?"

"Probably."

"Do you think you might have been followed?"

"I didn't see anybody behind me."

I returned to the window and watched for a time. There was nothing suspicious.

"I don't know how to thank you," I finally said.

"I'm tense again," she said.

We went back to the bedroom and I showed my gratitude for as hard and long as I could. It was still a hands and mouth below the neck proposition, but we all have our hangups and it was certainly wild and interesting country. Afterwards, she broiled lamb chops and I tossed a salad. Later, we drank coffee and smoked

some small black cigars she had. It was dark by then and the rain had stopped.

Suddenly, she placed hers in the ashtray and rose.

"I'm going back to the bathroom, for a time," she said, and she did.

She'd been in there several minutes with the water running when the telephone rang. I didn't know what to do. It could be a boyfriend, a husband, someone who wouldn't like my voice.

"Hello?" There was the crackle of long distance and bad connection. "Hello?" I repeated, after several seconds.

"Em...? Is Em...there...?" said a man's voice, sounding as through a seashell. "Who is...this...?"

"Jess," I said, "Smithson. I'm renting this place for a week. It belongs to some lady. I don't know her name."

"Tell her...Percy's...called."

"I don't know that I'll see her. But is there any message?"

"Just that...I'll be...coming."

There was a click, and the echoes went away.

I went to the bathroom door and knocked gently.

"You had a phone call," I said.

The water stopped running.

"What?"

At that moment, the doorbell rang. I rushed to the kitchen window and looked out. I couldn't see who was there, but there was a car parked up the street and it was blue.

I returned to the bathroom door.

"They're here," I said.

"Go to the bedroom," she said. "Get in the closet. Don't come out until I tell you."

"What are you going to do?"

The doorbell rang again.

"Do it!"

So I did. She seemed to have something in mind and I didn't.

Among garments in the darkness, I listened. Her voice and a harsh masculine one. They talked for about half a minute. It sounded as if he had come in. Suddenly there was a scream — his — cut short in a matter of seconds, followed by a crash.

I was out of the closet and heading for the bedroom door.

"Stay in there." Her voice came steady. "Until I tell you to come out."

I backed up, almost against my will. There was a lot of authority in her voice.

"Okay," she said, a little later. "Come out, and bring my raincoat."

I returned to the closet.

When I entered the living room, there was a still figure on the floor beside her. It was covered by the serape. She wore nothing but a towel about her head and the glasses. She took the coat and pulled it on.

"You'd said 'they.' How many are there?" she asked.

"There were two. I thought I'd left them in Atlanta."

"There's a car out there?"

"Yes."

"Would the other one be in it, or out prowling around?"

"Probably prowling."

"Go back to your closet."

"Now wait a minute! I'm not going to have a woman..."

"Do it!"

Again that compulsion, as she glared at me, and a return of that strange tingling along my spine. I did as she told me.

I heard her go out. After maybe five minutes, I left the closet and returned to the front room. I raised the serepe for a look.

Another five minutes, perhaps, and she returned. I was smoking one of her cigars and had a drink in my hand.

"Make mine wine," she said.

"The other one . . . ?"

" . . . will not bother you."

"What did you do to them?"

"Don't ask me. I did you a favor, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Get me a glass of wine."

I went and poured it. I took it to her.

"If we take them down to the dock . . . Your friend won't mind losing some dead weight at sea, will he?" she asked.

"No."

She took a large swallow.

"I'll finish in the bathroom now," she said, "and then we'll get them into the car. We may have to hang around awhile before we can unload them."

"Yes."

Later, after I had disposed of the blue Fury, we got them into her car and she drove slowly to the place I told her. It was after midnight before we were able to unload them and stow them on the boat.

I turned toward her then, in the shadow of a piling.

"You've been very good to me," I said.

She smiled.

"You made it worth a little effort," she said. "You up to another?"

"Right here?"

She laughed and opened her coat. She hadn't bothered dressing.

"Where else?"

I was up to it. As I held her, I realized that I did not want it to end like this.

"You could come with me," I said. "I'd like it if you would. I'd like to have you around," and I kissed her full on the mouth and held her to me with almost all of my strength. For a moment, it seemed that I felt something wet on her cheek against mine. Then she turned and broke my embrace with a single gesture and pushed me away.

"Go on," she said. "You're not that good. I've got better things to do."

Her scarf seemed to be blowing, though there was no wind. She turned quickly and started back toward the car. I began to follow her.

Her voice became hard again, harder than I'd ever heard it.

"Get aboard that boat now," she said, her back to me. "Do it!"

Again the compulsion, very real this time.

"All right," I said. "Good-bye, and thanks," and then I had to go.

Much later that night, Joe and I pushed the two limestone statues over the side into the Gulf Stream. I leaned on the rail for a long while after that, before I realized I had forgotten to tell her that Percy was coming. Later, the sun rose up at my back, turning the sea to a fleece of gold in the west. ●

Roger Zelazny

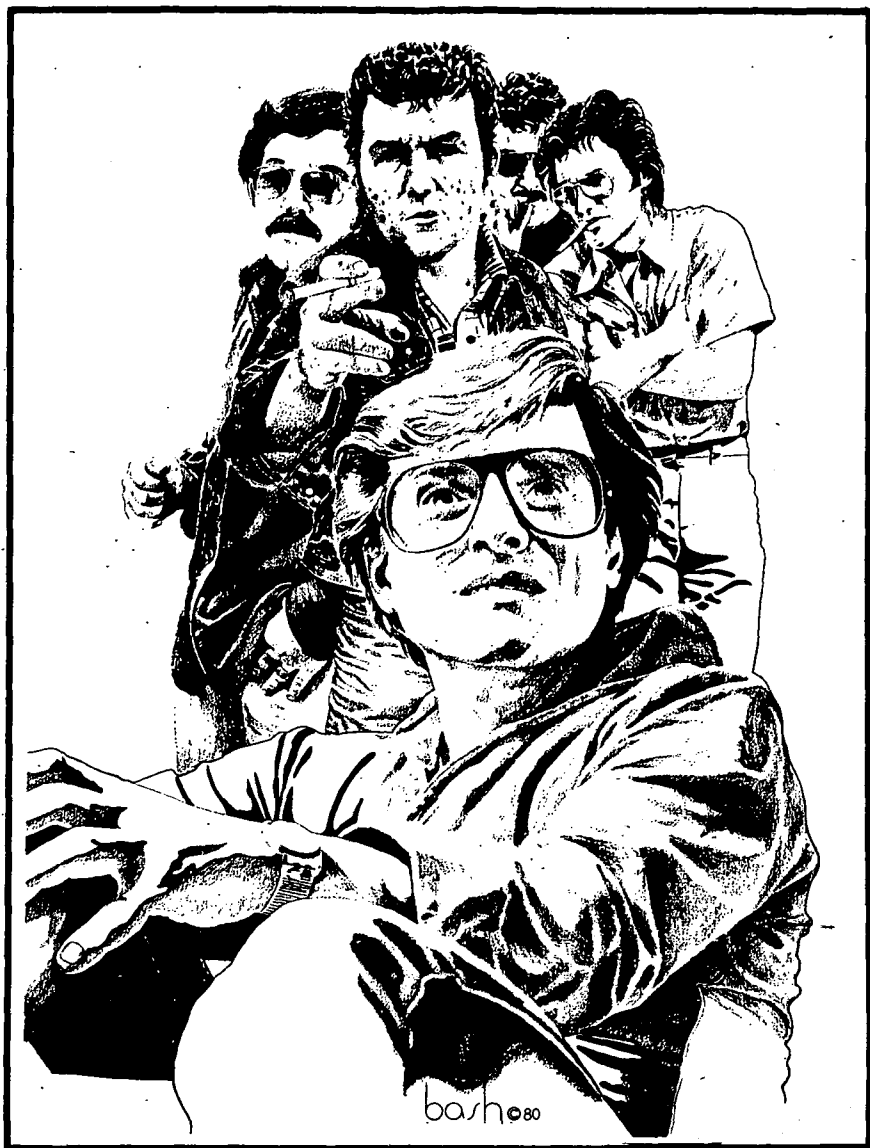
One of the leading New Wave writers during the '60s, Roger Zelazny helped elevate sf to higher literary planes, exploring experimental narrative techniques, intense themes and challenging backgrounds while plumbing the psyches of his characters. Never sticking to any one category of the genre, he continues to surprise and delight his multitudinous fans (themselves often devoted to one category or another) with his immensely readable, engrossing and entertaining fiction. He has over 90 short stories and articles to his credit which have appeared in all the major magazines and more, plus 28 books, including one special limited edition recently published by Norstrilia Press, *When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed*, and *Other Poems*. He has received the coveted "Hugo" award three times — 1966, 1968 and 1976 — for *And Call Me Conrad* (novel), *Lord of Light* (novel) and *"Home is the Hangman"* (novella). His fellow members of the Science Fiction Writers of America have

bestowed their highest honor, the "Nebula," on him three times — twice in 1966 and once in 1976 — for *"He Who Shapes"* (novella), *"The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth"* (novellette) and *"Home is The Hangman."* Other distinctions include the "Prix Apollo," 1972 for the French edition of *Isle of the Dead*; the "Balrog" award, 1980, short fiction category, for *"The Last Defender of Camelot"*; plus his *Doorways in the Sand* was selected by the American Library Association as one of the "Best Books for Young Adults" published in 1976. Much more could be said about Zelazny the writer, but we'd like to add a word about Zelazny the man; he is truly one who continues to enjoy what he is doing and who has somehow avoided the less appealing manifestations of fan worship, like arrogance and/or the unwillingness to speak civilly to mere mortals. He takes time to be with his people, talk to them, help them when possible. — Editor

Dance

Any minute now
the words will replay themselves
within the mind's ear:
The clown and the singer
fall at last,
juggler of hearts
and crier at the sticking place
falter,
footing lost, voice broken,
embracing in the downward spinning,
and clown take up the cry,
falling caller
catch the dark staccato
laughter, netless
in the minute's eye.

— Roger Zelazny



Limited Edition

FINE ART PRINTS by BASH

"Conquest, Slaughter, Famine & Death were staring down at me," illustration from **ALL THE LIES THAT ARE MY LIFE**, Harlan Ellison, special trade edition, Underwood-Miller. This and other illos from the book available in a portfolio including nine 16"x20" studio prints. Other fine art prints available at \$15 each. Send \$5 for 32-page brochure with artist's bio by Harlan Ellison. Cashiers checks or Money Orders only

THE BASH NIGHT GALLERY

14714½ Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Illustrated by Stephen Fabian

The Amazing Hall of Fame

The Amazing Hall of Fame is a transparent device whereby we are able to present classics from the good old days of science fiction's oldest publication, along with new words of introduction and comment by their famous authors. Their names are famous today, but things were usually not so rosy when the stories were written. Many of these early writers are delighted to celebrate Amazing's illustrious past with us in the Hall of Fame — an honor offering a happy contrast to bygone, threadbare days. It is an added pleasure for us to peek into the past with each author as he reminisces about where he was in the story of his life when the Amazing story was created. — Ed

Ron Goulart's **PLUMROSE**

Introducing PLUMROSE

THIS STORY about time travel, love, murder and detection was written nearly twenty years ago and first appeared in the June 1963 issue of *Fantastic*. The mind isn't always the best of time machines, often functioning nearly as unpredictably as the one that plucks Bert Willsey from 1961 and deposits him in the San Francisco of 1897, and I must admit to being a shade hazy about the exact details of the gestation and birth of "Plumrose."

I'm a native Californian and from 1955 to around 1960 I lived in San Francisco, alternating periods of working as an advertising

copywriter with furtive spells of freelancing. I think by the time the first "Plumrose" story appeared in print I must've been residing in the Los Angeles area, whereat I was making a vain attempt to be a comedy writer for such television shows as *Dobie Gillis* and *Dick Van Dyke*.

Time travelling back to San Francisco continues to fascinate me, by the way. My newest DAW novel, *The Robot In The Closet*, has Frisco on the eve of the 1906 Quake as one of the stops on the chronic itinerary.

While working in San Francisco and liv-

PLUMROSE/HALL OF FAME 55

ing in the Pacific Heights area, I did a lot of wandering around the city. I can remember many solitary hikes through foggy night streets, gazing at the rows of ginger bread-encrusted Victorian houses which had been standing since the 19th Century. I also got to know a few oldtimers, people who'd lived in the city in the 1890s, and when I began to think about doing a series of occult detective stories set in the San Francisco of the Nineties, I asked them a lot of questions about what it had been like back then. Reading the story again, I notice that at least some of that eyewitness stuff got into it.

Since the period of my life when I wrote "Plumrose" was only sporadically joyful, I identified with Bert Willsey and envied his escape from his publicity job and his finding of a terrific girl. Myself, when not questing for the right girl, was haunted by visions of being recaptured and hauled back to the ad game. This may also account for the facts that the butler in this story has the same name as my old agency boss and the Detroit Trunk Fiend was named after my former copy chief (who today operates his own advertising agency in San Francisco). "Plumrose" isn't based on a specific real-life person. I detect a resemblance to W.C. Fields and to one of the oldtimers who provided me with information on the way it was. The name itself comes from a brand of canned ham I was partial to in my bachelor days.

I sold three of the "Plumrose" stories before Cele Lalli, the then editor of *Fantastic* and *Amazing*, decided she'd had enough. By that time I'd written another half-dozen as I recall. Of course Plumrose was never quite able to get Bert back to his own time. He stayed in the 1890s, continued his romance with Emily and worked as a sort of Watson to the occult detective. In one of their cases they even located Emily's longlost mother. In the final story, which I somehow never could bring myself to write, I intended to have Bert accidentally returned to his own time and separated from the girl forever. That story was also going to involve a steam airship.

Reading "Plumrose" after nearly two decades I notice a few lines I'd change now, but I basically like what that young Ron Goulart was doing and think he shows a good deal of promise. This story you're about to read was picked up by Anthony Boucher, who had a weakness for yarns that blended detection with fantasy, and appeared in his 1964 edition of the *Best Detective Stories of The Year*. Those unpublished "Plumrose" stories remain in storage, appropriately enough, out in San Francisco, and Bert remains permanently stranded in the past with Emily.

The girl I eventually found was not a tall, willowy brunette, but rather a small willowy redhead. But she affected my life as profoundly as Emily affected Bert's.

— Ron Goulart

The man with the ginger whiskers smiled tentatively at me, then came over and handed me a hat and some kind of overcoat. Tucked up under his arm he had a square box that looked something like a rural telephone. There were streetcars all around now and I didn't hear what he was saying the first time he spoke. Behind the man a horse-drawn beer wagon clogged by.

Somehow I felt that if I accepted the clothes I'd be committed. I hesitated, looking back over my shoulder. My office building was still there. Except it was newer and brighter looking and there was a man with a black beard and an odd suit loitering in front of it.

"I'm afraid it will take a bit of getting used to," said the ginger-whiskered man. "I hope you will understand and give us a few hours of your time."

I had been working for Caulkins-Nowlan Publicity for nearly a year. Every morning at 10:15 I went out and walked around the block to a place called the Crescent Coffee Shop. The place wouldn't be there now I knew. And I knew that for some reason it was no longer September of 1961 in San Francisco.

I didn't smack myself on the brow and cry out. I felt a little unsettled in the stomach and that was about it. There are people who get up and walk a couple of blocks after they've been shot dead. You never know how you're going to react.

"You were expecting me?" I asked the man.

"Not you specifically," he said. He smiled a little more freely. "Someone, however, in your profession." He urged the hat and coat on me. "Get into these and you won't stand out. As it is, I think the fellow over there saw you materialize."

I put the coat on. It was a size too tight or maybe that was the fashion. I put the hat on, the first one I'd worn since I'd come to San Francisco. "Materialize?" I said as he took my arm.

"I have a carriage waiting nearby," he said. "If you'll do me the favor of coming to my home and speaking to my daughter, I think I can explain things as we travel."

"Fine," I said. I was in the mood for having things explained.

WE GOT INTO the carriage, which was in an alley I didn't remember as being there. The man with the ginger whiskers carefully put the square box on the seat between us and then gave his driver the order to get under way.

"My name is Gibson G. Southwell," he said.

"Mine's Bert Willsey," I said. I was studying the streets, the people. "What year is this? Sometime in the '90s?"

Southwell smiled. "You're very perceptive. You would be in your profession. September 20, 1897."

"And how did you get me here?"

Southwell placed a hand on the square box. "Plumrose invented it. I must apologize, Mr. Willsey, for being desperate enough to use it. There seemed no other course of action. I hope that by sunset you will be back in your rightful era."

"It'll be a damned long coffee break even so." The carriage seemed to be heading for the general direction of Nob Hill. "Just what are you desperate about?"

"My daughter, Emily, has fallen under the spell of a scoundrel," said Southwell, slumping slightly on the black leather seat.

"Oh?" There were more trees everywhere, turning to autumn.

"It all began when we took the braces off her teeth. Our regular dentist had passed away and we chose a new one on the suggestion of a close family friend, the daughter of a highly respected railroad executive. I myself, by the way, am in the tea business in an import way. To get on, Emily, my daughter, fell gradually in love with this dentist. You see, my wife, Mrs. Southwell, disappeared while on a pleasure cruise up the Sacramento three summers ago. Since then I've looked after Emily myself. Except for getting her teeth finally fixed properly I've bungled parenthood, Mr. Willsey."

"You mentioned a name awhile back," I said taking my hat off and resting it between my knees. "Where does he come in?"

"Plumrose?" asked Southwell, blinking and frowning. "Surely you've heard of Edwin Plumrose?"

"I don't think so."

"Plumrose, the renowned ghost detective and occult investigator. Plumrose, who tampers with the most highly guarded secrets of Nature. He invented this time ray."

"It was his idea to bring me here?"

Southwell's whiskers drooped. "All else has failed. Yet I know this dentist is the

guilty man. Proof, even with three Pinkertons at work, has not been forthcoming. He's a clever man, especially for a dentist. My good friend, Plumrose, agreed to advise me although this is not an occult case."

"It's pretty occult to me," I said as the carriage turned into a wide pathway. "I still don't know why I'm here."

"Oh, yes," said Southwell. The carriage stopped in front of a vast white Victorian house and we got out. I watched him lift the time ray box off the seat, ready to grab it if it looked at all like slipping. Southwell took my arm and we halted at the first step of the stairway. "Plumrose assumed that by your time the entire case would have been solved. He also feels that the present can be modified by an expert, which you will have to admit Plumrose is. So then. We brought you here to talk to Emily and to explain the final outcome of the case to her. After you tell her what you know of this man she's become infatuated with we will get to work saving her from him."

"Hold it, Mr. Southwell," I said. "What case is it I'm supposed to know about?"

"You are aware of so many, yes. Forgive me. My parental anxiety has caused me to be rather unspecific. I am referring to the famed Nob Hill Fiend case. I am afraid that this man Emily is involved with is the Fiend himself. I have several reasons for so thinking. She refuses to stop seeing him and, being no old-fashioned parent, I will not use force to prevent her. The man's name is Leo X. Guthrie." Southwell watched my face, waiting.

Finally I nodded. "Leo X. Guthrie."

"Then I'm right. He is indeed the Nob Hill Fiend."

"Mr. Southwell," I said, following him up the steps, "I've never heard of Leo X. Guthrie."

The brass knocker dropped from his hand. "It can't be that he is not the Fiend."

"He may be the Fiend and he may not be the Fiend. I have no way of telling."

"Surely by 1906 the case has been solved."

A butler with a stage Irish brogue let us in. After we'd gotten rid of our coats and hats Southwell took me into a long shadowy living room. The grilled fireplace had a fire going in it and, after placing the time ray on a marble-topped table, Southwell held his hands to the glow.

"What has 1906 to do with it?" I asked, moving up to study the square box that had pulled me back to 1897.

Nothing happened for a few still seconds. Then Southwell dashed over to my side. "Willsey, aren't you from 1906?"

"No," I said. "1906 was the year of the big earthquake in San Francisco. Quite awhile before I was born. When I went out to coffee this morning it was September 20, 1961."

We both bent to study the dials on the time ray. "My lord," said Southwell, pointing. "The year gauge is all askew. Did that happen during the trip here do you think?"

"Something was askew to start with."

"Plumrose guaranteed it would work this time."

"Work this time?"

"There was some trouble a few weeks ago sending a rat back and forth in time. Plumrose promised that the trouble had been eliminated."

"What happened to the rat?"

"We lost him somewhere around 1901."

"Well, I'm happy to have been part of this scientific experiment, Mr. Southwell. How about you and your friend, Plumrose, sending me back home to 1961?"

"Suppose you get sidetracked in 1901 the way the rat did?" Southwell shook

his head. "I'll have to consult Plumrose."

"Let's go now."

"Emily is already expecting us. I sent Bascom to summon her. She should be descending at any moment." Southwell suddenly grabbed me by the arms. "Even a reporter from 1961 must know of the Nob Hill Fiend case. Please try to remember."

"Mr. Southwell, I'm not a reporter."

He let go and stepped back. "I told Plumrose it would be this way. There was always the chance we wouldn't get a reporter."

"Seems like the odds would be against you. Picking one person out of the future at random."

"It wasn't at random. That's why I was stationed in front of the *Chronicle* building with the time ray. I sincerely hoped for a crime reporter, although any newsman would have done. A reporter from 1906 could give us all the details and end this situation before Emily comes to harm."

I sat down in a fat chair and let my head rest back against the antimacassar. "The *Chronicle* hasn't been in that building for years, Mr. Southwell. They're over on Mission Street."

Southwell went and stood closer to the fire, silent.

"Ready to concede, father? Even Plumrose has failed. It must be fate taking a hand. Can't you step aside and let Leo and I have our happiness?"

I turned. Standing in the doorway was a slim, dark-haired girl. Her hair was worn up and she had on a long dark skirt and a white blouse. Guthrie may have been a fiend but he was doing all right as a dentist. Emily had a fine smile. In fact, she was the best looking girl I'd seen since I came to San Francisco. I got to my feet. Things always work that way. You can hang around bars in Maiden Lane and North Beach and go to cocktail parties and never have spectacular luck. Then you're sucked back to 1897 and there's a beautiful girl where you least expect to see one.

Southwell shrugged and looked hopefully at me. "Can you tell us anything, Mr. Willsey?"

"I have a vague idea I've heard about this whole business, the Nob Hill Fiend and all, years ago." I shook my head. "Nothing definite, though. See, I'm in public relations. Publicity and advertising sort of work. I'm not up on famous crimes."

"Perhaps Mr. Willsey would like a cup of tea," said the girl. "We have tea at all hours here," she said to me, smiling faintly.

I said that would be fine. "I'm sorry I can't help out in all this, Miss Southwell."

"You can help most by leaving things alone," Emily said. "I intend to marry Leo and if father does not give us his blessings soon we shall have to take more drastic steps."

Southwell clutched his side and gave an anguished cry. "I must lie down in my study. Forgive me, Mr. Willsey. I'll return shortly and settle things."

Emily pulled a bell rope as her father tottered off through a curtained doorway. "The tea will be here shortly," she said. "Bascom is out playing cards with some of the Pinkerton detectives and he may not hear the bell at once."

Con conversationally I said, "What makes your father think Guthrie is a fiend?"

Emily's nostrils flared, which nostrils still did in 1897, and she said, "Father is mistaken. Anyone who really knew Leo could not believe that he was in any way connected with these terrible crimes."

"What has this fiend done exactly?"

"He murders young girls, using a disgusting assortment of surgical instruments."

Father seems to feel that dentistry is one step from surgery and thus he suspects Leo."

"Your father told me Guthrie was recommended to you by a girl friend of yours. What does she think about the case?"

Emily paled. "She was the second victim of the Nob Hill Fiend."

"Coincidences like that do turn up," I said.

Southwell tottered back into the room. "Excuse us, my dear. I've decided we must see Plumrose at once."

"Give him my regards," the girl said. "Except for his behavior in this matter I have a great respect for him and his work. But occult detection is one thing and love another."

Southwell and I went to see Plumrose.

PLUMROSE LIVED in a narrow gable roofed house on a slanting street. The house stood back from a wrought iron fence and was bordered with high grass and wild shrubs. The sharp fall wind swayed the grass and arms of cast iron Cupids and Psyches flashed in the sun. Horns and antlers flashed, too, and something that looked like the left half of a goat.

A small round woman who looked something like a bleached-out gypsy let us in after Southwell had used the gargoyle knocker. "Mrs. Hoggins," he said, "we must see Plumrose at once."

She stepped aside, squinting at the time ray Southwell had under his arm. "He's in his study trying to communicate with Aristotle."

"For some new case?" asked Southwell, stepping into the soft-shadow-blurred hallway.

"No, he's simply in an argumentative mood and I won't let him bait me." The woman studied me. "This is the one you fished from the future?"

"Yes," said Southwell, hanging his overcoat and hat and mine on the gold-pronged hat tree. "There's been some small error."

"I knew it," Mrs. Hoggins said to me. "I told him to try the contrivance on a few more rats first."

"That's splendid," said a deep voice from somewhere down the hall. "I had actually gotten through to Aristotle's personal secretary and then all this foolishness in the hallway cut me off." A fat pink man with white hair and whiskers stepped from a doorway. He was wearing an art nouveau dressing gown and its pockets were heavy with papers and ribbon-tied scrolls and vague objects with obscure markings. He noticed me and said, "The chronic argonaut, is it?"

Southwell held out the time ray box. "The dial got askew."

"Go down in the cellar, Mrs. Hoggins, and fetch up some of the special brandy for our guests."

"Something fetid and loathsome is a-roam down there," the woman said, hiding her hands in her striped apron.

"On the contrary," said Plumrose. "I exorcised the place not a month ago and we also had that insect specialist in to nose around."

"A well run household would have its cellar exorcised once a week," the housekeeper said, rumbling off.

Plumrose beckoned us into his study. It was a medium-sized room with shuttered windows that almost hid a view of a weedy back yard dotted with more statuary. There were two twisted wood rocking chairs and a worn-down striped loveseat. Plumrose took the loveseat and left the rockers for Southwell and myself. "My Uncle Wendell was twice arrested for attempts on the life of his domestic," said Plumrose. He considered me for a moment. "This fellow looks

fine to me, Southwell. Why the complaints?"

"He's from the wrong year," said Southwell, rocking nervously. "From 1961." He held out the time ray to Plumrose.

The fat occult investigator squinted an eye at the square box. "No wonder. You let the dial get askew."

"It was that way when you gave it to me."

"Nonsense," Plumrose grabbed the box and rattled it. "Listen to what other mischief you've caused, Southwell." Opening a small metal door in the time ray box Plumrose held it upside down over the thick flowered rug. "Out of there, out." There was a squeak and a white mouse somersaulted to the floor and skittered under a clawfooted table. "What can you expect when you let mice get inside?"

"There are no mice at my home," said Southwell. "That's one of your experimental mice."

"His leg wasn't banded."

"Hey," I said, "what say we forget our differences and get me back to 1961."

Plumrose took a flat stick from his dressing gown pocket and poked it into the time box. "This will take some work, Mr. —"

"Bert Willsey," I interjected.

"It will require some careful work, Willsey. I made the mistake of assuming Southwell knew how to use a time ray."

"Where would I learn to use a time ray? That's the only one in the world."

"My Cousin Raymond once guided a balloon across four hundred square miles of unfamiliar country and he had never before been higher off the ground than seventeen feet," said Plumrose, dropping the box onto an ottoman.

"How long to fix that?" I asked.

"A few days," said Plumrose.

"That's great. By the time I get back I'll be a missing person and unemployed."

"I'll give you a job here," said Plumrose. "I need a secretary. A newspaperman like yourself should fit in nicely in that capacity for a few days."

"He's not a newspaperman," said Southwell. "That's another factor that went afoul."

"You couldn't even aim it at the *Chronicle* building?"

"They moved the building over to Mission Street," I said.

Plumrose rested his arm on the back of the loveseat and looked at the fireplace.

"Well," he said.

"He doesn't even know anything about Leo X. Guthrie," explained Southwell, standing. "While I am in sympathy with Mr. Willsey's problem, and feel indirectly responsible, this unfortunate blunder isn't helping my poor Emily any."

"I'll solve that case within two days," said Plumrose. To me he said, "What did you do up there in the future?"

"Publicity and advertising."

"Then you'll still make a good assistant and secretary. I'll have you back in the right time period within three days."

Mrs. Hoggins arrived with a dusty bottle of brandy and three bright glasses on a copper tray. "So much for what you know," she said to Plumrose as she put the tray on one of the round dark wood tables. "There's three trolls down there and they got into the sherry."

"Trolls should have better taste than that," said Plumrose, reaching for the brandy. "I'll attend to them after I solve the problems of Southwell and Willsey here."

"You had better. You know how trolls can multiply." She hid her hands in the

apron and left.

Plumrose opened the brandy and poured a glass for each of us. "A toast," he said, raising his and smiling from Southwell to me. "To the future."

BY NIGHT I was moved into one of Plumrose's spare rooms. There didn't seem to be much else to do until the time ray got fixed and Southwell had gone off without making any offer of putting me up at his place. The room was slant-ceilinged and on the second floor in back. The windows were leaded stained glass and as I paced they gave me kaleidoscope shots of the overgrown backyard.

The room was used for storage and there were piles of occult equipment stacked beyond the narrow canopied bed. As I wandered around the room I tried to catalogue the stuff in my mind. There were parts of stone demons, Egyptian amulets, mystical baskets, bundles of spirit photographs, scraps of illuminated manuscripts, brass gongs, the upper half of a fortune telling automaton, three stuffed snakes and a neat stack of the past months' San Francisco newspapers. These last were actually on the bed itself and I gathered them up and sat in a tufted easy chair under the tiffany lamp on the reading table. I wasn't yet adjusted to being in 1897 and I handled the newspapers carefully, expecting them to flake and tatter. But they were crisp and new.

As I went through the back issues I spotted several stories about the Nob Hill Fiend. The papers didn't use many photos then, mostly sketches. The Fiend had done in six young girls so far over a period of some five and a half months. Five of the girls had either been found or had originally lived in the Nob Hill area. That was how the Fiend got his name. A sketch of one of the victims struck me.

The girl's name was Hester Cheyney and they'd found her body in an alley off Clay Street nearly two months back. I'd seen this girl's picture before. Where, I couldn't say.

In the back pages of the papers, among the ads for magnetic belts and massage parlors, I found a drawing of Leo X. Guthrie. It was featured in an ad for his painless dentistry offices on California Street. And I recognized him. Someplace I had seen this drawing and the drawing of the Cheyney girl. Seen them together.

Lighting one of my cigarettes, I closed my eyes. Back, or rather ahead, in 1956 I had needed three extra units to finish my last semester at UCLA. I'd taken a criminology course that had given a quick survey of the great crimes of the past century. Guthrie's picture had been in the textbook. It had come just before the photo of a victim of the Detroit Trunk Fiend. Since I always skipped over that one, Guthrie's picture was my cue to jump a few pages.

All at once I thought of Emily Southwell. Was she going to be the next victim? I couldn't remember a picture of her nor a mention of her as one of the victims. But since Guthrie was still running around loose it was obvious he was going to commit a few more crimes. I couldn't remember the final total of victims. If it was six he was all done. I wasn't sure.

I was sure, though, that Guthrie was the Nob Hill Fiend. I tossed the newspapers back on the bed and went to find Plumrose.

He was sitting on the top step ten feet down from my door. He had on a fresh dressing gown and was holding an opaque brandy glass. "You've been over the newspapers?"

"Yeah. You left them there?"

Plumrose nodded, spinning the glass under his wide flat nose. "I assumed a case as famous as this one is going to be would be known to a great many people in the future. The accounts and pictures set you to thinking in the manner I had hoped. Is Leo X. Guthrie the man?"

I told him Guthrie was and told him why I knew. "So what's to do about it? Emily might believe me if I talked to her."

"Doubtful," said Plumrose. "Confronting Guthrie is a better piece of action. You don't recall how he was finally caught?"

"No. Maybe that was in the pages I skipped."

"Are you up to giving the impression that you have a toothache?"

"Now that you mention it," I said. "Ever since I've been here in 1897 I've had a toothache."

"That's interesting." Plumrose caught the griffin newel post and tugged himself to a standing position. "Are you serious? Little is known about the side effects of time travel."

I touched my jaw. "I hadn't thought of it before but it's true."

"Very good."

"I go to Guthrie posing as a patient and try to throw a scare into him."

"Yes. Most pattern killers are very superstitious men. There's a strong possibility that you can frighten Guthrie into confessing. To be safe I'll also suggest to Southwell that he double the Pinkertons."

"How about clothes to wear when I visit Guthrie?"

"Wear what you have. The suit is not alarmingly futuristic. Yet it should have a vaguely unpleasant effect. Try it. Breakfast is at eight. Good night."

"Good night." I went back to my slant-ceilinged room and studied the drawing of Leo X. Guthrie.

ALL SIX OF the chairs in Leo X. Guthrie's waiting room were filled. The half-dozen patients were all young girls, each one pretty enough to be an upcoming Fiend victim. I must have shuddered because the pretty young receptionist said to me, "You're in pain, sir?"

"It's nothing," I said, smiling manfully around at my fellow patients. "However, I would like to consult Dr. Guthrie if possible. He's been highly recommended."

"Oh? Well, I can let you see Dr. Guthrie at four this afternoon. Your name please?"

Since Emily might have mentioned me to him I decided to give a fake name. "Maxwell Arnold, Jr.," I said, using the name of the Detroit Trunk Fiend.

"We'll expect you back at four then, Mr. Arnold."

It was hardly one o'clock now. But I didn't want to let Guthrie slip away. "Thank you," I said. "I'll wait."

By two I got a chance to sit down and by five I was let into Guthrie's office. He was a tall man with pale skin and blue-black hair and mustache. "What seems to be bothering you, Mr. Arnold?" he asked, pointing me into the chair.

"Toothache, doctor," I said.

"That's an interesting suit you're wearing. European?"

"No," I said. "In fact. . ."

"Open your mouth, please."

I opened it. "The reason. . ."

"Wider. Don't talk."

"I've come to. . ."

"Very serious," he said, poking at a canine tooth. "Sit quietly, Mr. Arnold."

"Dr. Guthrie, I know who you. . ."

Guthrie clamped a rubber mouthpiece over my face and said, "Inhale, Mr. Willsey. When you wake up let this be a lesson to you. Don't stand in the way of young love."

"I accuse," I said and fell asleep.

IT WAS NIGHT outside when I woke up. I was still in the dentist chair, alone in the silent unlit office. I shook my head in small circles and stood up. Even in my 1961 suit I hadn't thrown much of a scare into Leo X. Guthrie.

I ran downstairs to the street and flagged a passing carriage. I'd hoped for a cab for hire but what I'd stopped a drapery salesman on his way to the Cliff House to meet a cabaret singer. When I explained I was intent on saving a young girl from a fiend he agreed to give me a lift uphill.

Emily Southwell was not at home. Her father told me she was attending a party at a nearby mansion and he feared she was planning to meet Guthrie there. I assured him I'd fix the Fiend before midnight and took off.

The party was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hollis Havenhurst. The house was a big, flat white thing fronted with marble columns. A few hundred square feet of close-cropped grass slanted up to the main entrance of the house. Carriages of all sorts were turning in at the wide driveway as I came running up. I shot over the three-foot-high stone wall and angled up for the side of the Havenhurst mansion.

I found a shadowy spot behind a shrub-bordered sundial and watched the windows of the ballroom. I had just caught sight of Emily and Guthrie when a hand tapped my left shoulder.

"Turn around quietly if you please," said a tenor voice.

I did. A black-overcoated man with a derby hat was pointing a pistol at me. I said, "I'm looking for a friend of mine." I nodded my head at the bright ballroom.

"Please to be putting your hands over your head, my lad," the man said. He had a spongy red mustache that seemed to move in counterpoint to his mouth.

"Miss Emily Southwell is expecting me," I said, raising my hands high.

"Not only expecting you but keeping a good weather eye out for you, my boy. So as to avoid being done in by the likes of you."

"Beg pardon?"

He stuck a hand into my coat pocket and brought out a silver scalpel. "You in the medical line, bucko?"

"That," I said, watching the thing catch the moonlight. "That's easily explained. I'm being framed. The man you want is Leo X. Guthrie, a dentist. He must have planted that on me. Look, just ask Miss Emily Southwell. She'll vouch for me. Then we can call the police. You are with the Pinkertons aren't you?"

The red mustached man shook his head. "No, laddie. I'm Police Inspector Rafferty McCafferty."

"You can still check me out with Miss Southwell."

"Bucko, it was Miss Southwell as reported you to me and swore she was right certain you were the Nob Hill Fiend and would be lurking hereabouts tonight. Come along with you."

So I went to jail.

THE HOLLIS HAVENHURST'S party had been on a Friday night. On Sunday an hour or so past lunch Plumrose finally succeeded in springing me. He told them I was his assistant and had been watching Emily on his orders. Plumrose really was highly thought of in San Francisco. According to McCafferty, Plumrose helped the Department out on all occult police matters. In a city like San Francisco that meant they worked together often.

Back safe at Plumrose's I hunched down in one of the rocking chairs and moved close to the fireplace. "How come you didn't get me out on Saturday?"

Plumrose poured two glasses of brandy. "I was locked in here most of yesterday, taking no messages. The result is a patched up time ray." He winked at the time box on the round dark table.

"It's fixed then? Great," I said. "Let's get me back to 1961. I want to get away from Nob Hill Fiends and ungrateful Southwells. Let him do Emily in for all I care. After she helped Guthrie frame me with the cops."

"Love does strange things."

"Not to me anymore."

"Wait," said Plumrose, handing me my brandy. "It seems to be fixed. However, considering what happened before I think it wise to try a few tests first."

I shrugged. "Sure. Go ahead."

"I'll begin in earnest tomorrow with a few rats and mice. Should we get the positive results I'm hoping for we can then proceed to use the ray on you."

I watched the fire crackle. "Today or tomorrow. What difference does it make."

"That's the attitude. Should you, by the way, decide to remain in this more leisurely age my offer of a job will stand," he said. When I didn't respond he went on. "All this excitement has put me several days behind on my naps. Excuse me and I'll try to catch up."

After Plumrose left I slid the ottoman over under my feet and tried to doze. My attention kept being drawn to the time ray. It might be days before Plumrose thought it was ready. It was risky but the mood I was in I didn't much care. I'd turn the thing on myself and hope to get back to 1961.

Quietly I went to the machine. All I had to do was set the time dial and flip a couple of switches. Plumrose had told me that much about how the ray worked. I set the dial for September 20, 1961, figuring to try and get back on the same day I'd left. I held the time ray with my thumb on the switch.

I stopped, thinking of something. Plumrose's house might not be there in 1961 or it might be full of people. I'd hate to materialize in the middle of a dinner table or a stone wall. The solution was to go to a place I could be pretty sure would still be empty in 1961. Golden Gate Park seemed like a good bet. I could pick a clear stretch of treeless ground and flip the switches.

Wrapping the box in a Coptic prayer shawl I slipped quietly out of the house. Mrs. Hoggins was off visiting and I was able to get up the street and catch a trolley without any trouble.

Twilight was filling the park when I finally reached it. Men in knickers and girls in bloomers were cycling all over the damn park and I had a tough time finding a quiet uncluttered stretch of ground.

Beyond a thick grove of cypresses I located a fine empty clearing free of cyclers or picnickers. Across the clearing the ground dropped away toward an overgrown pathway. There was silence all around me. I unwrapped the time ray and checked the dial. It had jiggled back to 1936 during the assorted trolley rides. I reset it for September 20, 1961, and held it out with the time ray nozzle pointed at my chest.

A girl screamed.

I hesitated. There was something familiar about the scream.

It came again.

"Leo, can it be that I have misjudged you after all?"

A bicycle fell over. And another.

"Stand still and don't struggle so," said Leo X. Guthrie. "I certainly didn't bring you to this secluded glade for some vulgar romantic interlude."

"Good lord," cried Emily.

I held tight to the time ray box and ran over to the downsloping edge of my clearing. Some twenty feet below, Leo X. Guthrie was standing over the fallen

Emily Southwell. He had a large surgical knife in his right hand and was throttling Emily with his left.

"Hey, Guthrie," I yelled. "Knock it off, you damned fiend!"

His head flicked back for a second and he laughed. "Too late, Willsey." He swung the knife up to strike Emily.

Well, I didn't have a chance of scrambling downhill and jumping him before he got her. So I did the only other thing. I threw the damn time box at him. It was a good toss. The heavy box caught him on the side of the head and made a nice thunking sound. Guthrie went over sideways on top of the tangled bicycles and the knife flipped over into the shrubbery.

Emily didn't faint or swoon. She got uneasily up and smiled at me. "Mr. Willsey, what a brave thing to do." She glanced down at the ruined time machine. "Especially at the sacrifice of your means of transportation."

I started down toward her. Eventually Plumrose could make another time machine. But girls like Emily are hard to find. ●



Ron Goulart

A prolific science fiction humorist, Ron Goulart is known for his satires of contemporary America portrayed in zany plots and mad futures peopled with super-detectives, secret agents and eccentric robots. His fiction is laced with wordplay, puns and cross references adding to the entertainment. The "Barnum System" with its wacky shape-changing Chameleon Corps form the background for many of his sixty stories and thirty-some books, which have a loyal following among lovers of lighter sf fare. Among the books are *Flux*; *A Whiff of Madness*; *What's Become of Screwloose*; *Shaggy Planet*; *When the Waker Sleeps*; *Crackpot*; and more. His 1970 novel, *After Things Fell Apart*, won him an Edgar for the best mystery novel of the year. His non-fiction includes *Cheap Thrills: An Informal History of the Pulp*; *The Hardboiled Dicks* (detectives in fiction); and a book about the effects of TV advertising on children. Goulart has written comic strips and has worked in the graphic story field including Byron Preiss' *Weird Hero* series. — EM

TO MAGAZINE RETAILERS:

AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION Magazine is pleased to announce its "Retail Display Allowance Plan" available to retailers interested in earning a display allowance of AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION Magazine. To obtain details and a copy of the formal contract, please write to the Marketing Department, Kable News Company, Inc., 777 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10017, our na-

tional distributor, who will act as administrator of our plan. Under our Retail Display Allowance Plan, in consideration for fulfilling conditions of the agreement, you will be entitled to receive a display allowance. This plan will become effective for all issues you receive subsequent to Kable News Company, Inc.'s written acceptance on our behalf of your application.

Elizabeth Morton namesake

Tasard squeezed into the upper cubicle through the thin wire, telling himself that the anxiety was normal. The anxiety was nothing to worry about; everyone felt that on being Called. Even as he wound himself to the smooth, familiar surface (so much like the cubicle below) and settled into Meditation, the anxiety began to drain. Remember the inexplicable joy of the Chosen had been their advice as they had sent him to the upper level. "The inexplicable joy of the Chosen," Tasard said, "their loneliness and their obligation." Mantra. The Surveyors were right, weren't they? And if not, how would he know? Tasard felt the nervousness again. Not acceptable. He sighed and crouched, sinking into Meditation through force of will.

The dreams of transcendence had become more intense recently (they had been readying him for the Call) and he gave himself to them, allowing their sensuousness. The dreams were of warmth and penetration, liquid and fire, rising and falling and as they seized him now it was as if it were no longer Meditation but the fire itself, the liquifying fire —

He heard the roar and knew then that it was no longer Meditation. They had, in the end, lied to him; this was happening now.

He was lifted.

Force flung him toward the opposite end of the cubicle; flickers of light strobed his vision. He smelled incense and was flung hopelessly into the world.

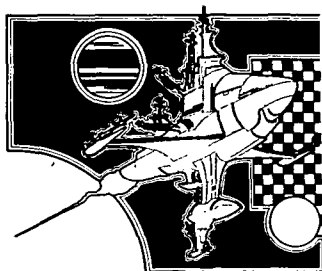
And bellowed with the inexplicable joy of the Chosen.

Leon Tasard picked up the revolver and pointed it at his head, his finger on the trigger. For just a moment he hesitated, the terrible, weakening reluctance stayed his finger and he looked out the window at the light he would never see again, the buildings, the aspect of the city. . . but no, it was too late for that, he was beyond remorse, beyond delusion. *It will always be the same*, Tasard thought, and so it must end. Suicide is an affirmation.

Weeping, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet with his name on it tore through his temple.

1980: Lancaster



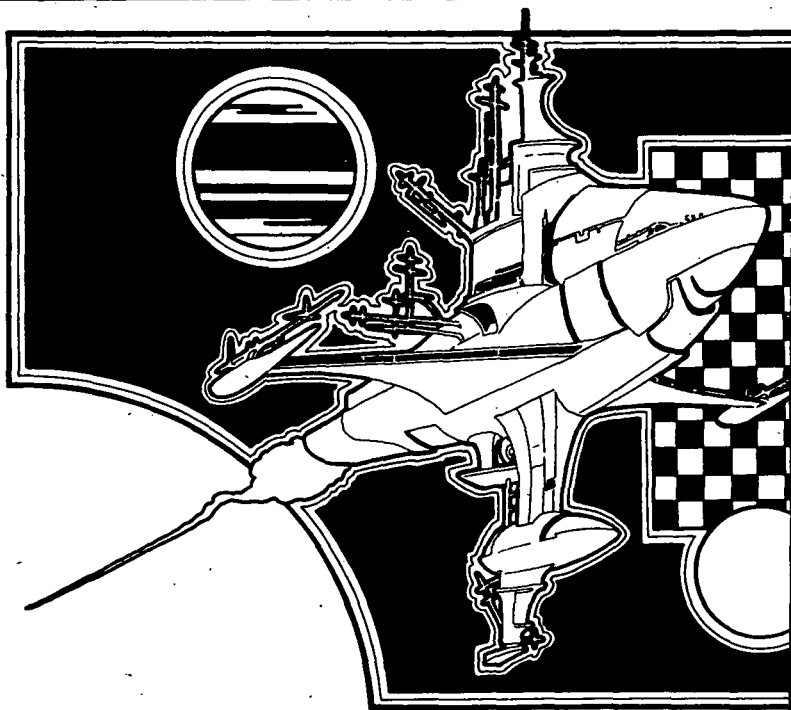
Elizabeth Morton is 29, a proof-reader/reasearcher in northeastern Pennsylvania, a first-rate cellist who has been writing for many years and whose first published story is "NAMESAKE"; she hopes to write more science fiction.

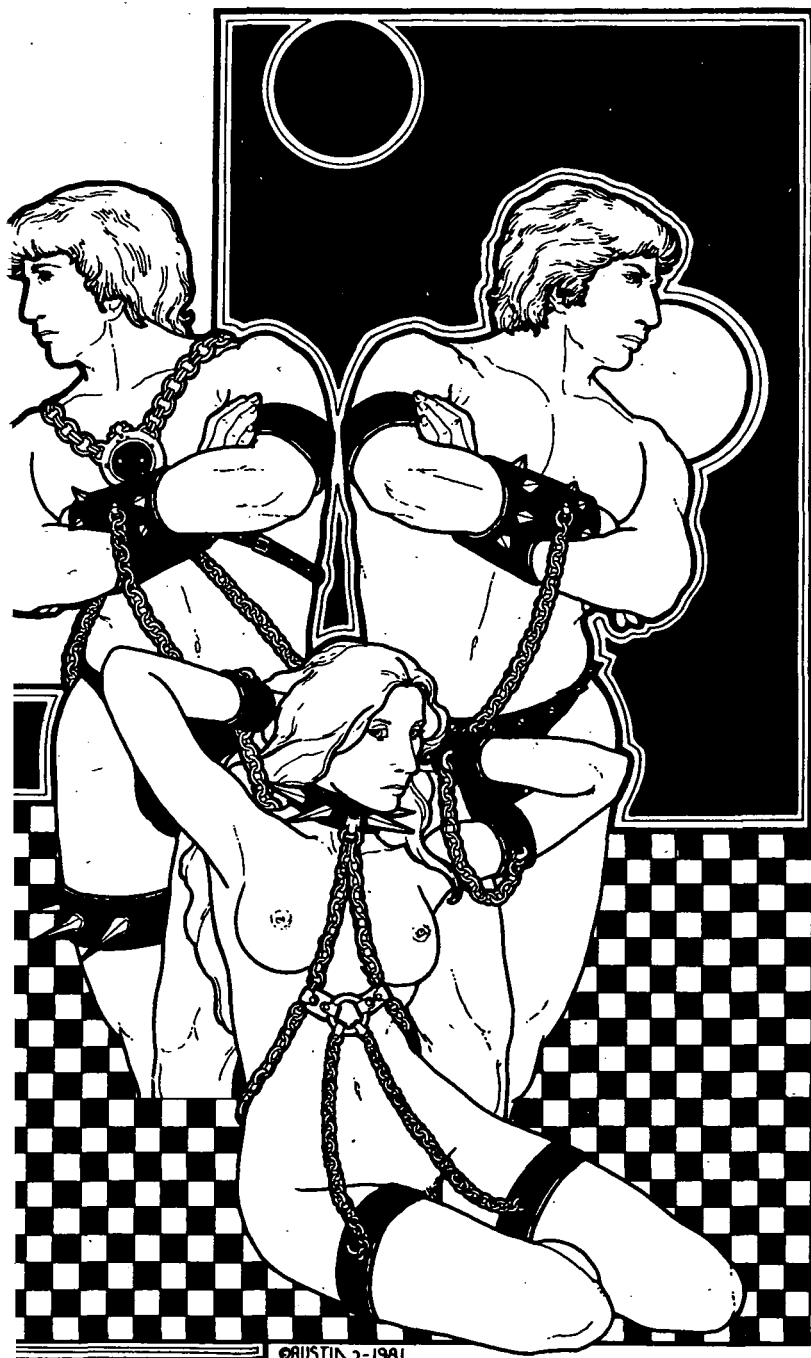
AMAZING/FANTASTIC 67

the Nosepickers of Dawr • OVA HAMLET

Ne'er did I think when first I came to the planet Dawr that here would happiness I find. No, on the contrary, when the slaver pieplate from Dawr descended on me as I strolled near my palatial Long Island estate and the slave-raiders tugged me into the craft, I thought the game was up.

My estate is in a secluded, bucolic section of Long Island City. I was out strolling, clad only in a borrowed negligee and velvet choker, and apparently the slavers mistook me for a woman. Hah! What a surprise they were in for! I fought them tooth and nail, scratching, biting, and kicking, squealing and squirming, until they subdued me and threw me, bound and gagged, into a murky corner of their perfectly round spaceship.





Illustrated by Alicia Austin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I lay there whimpering in the dark until we arrived at the planet that lies directly opposite the moon in the sun's orbit, where it is perpetually hidden from earthly eyes. Of course, the Dawries know all about earth and have been visiting here for years. Mostly they drag away proud and haughty earthwomen for the sheer fun of breaking their spirits in the slave-pens of Dawr.

But once in a while they take a man, either by mistake, or just because they think he's such a sweetie that they can't keep their horny little paws off his bod.

Where do you think Judge Crater is?

How about Jimmy Hoffa?

Lin Piao?

Lavrenti Beria?

Ho! say I, and, Ho! and once again yet, Ho!

Dawr, that's where they are!

Well, as I was saying, they no sooner dragged me from my snug little corner to the center of the pieplate after we'd landed on Dawr, delivering the most delicious little kicks here and tugs there as they did it, when one of those great nasty bullies grabbed me in a certain spot (I can't tell you where, *blush!*) and drew back his hand with the speed of a weasel.

"Whoopsie!" he exclaimed in rage.

"Sa matter?" his companion grumbled. "She bite? Har, har, har!"

"She's no she," the first Dawrian said. He reached over and removed my gag. This is how he did it. He took my cheeks between the thumb and fingers of one strong, rough hand, and with the other he reached right between my lips and pulled out the gag. His hand was right inside my mouth. I could feel those nasty rough fingers right on my tender pink tongue.

Well!

Anyway, dearie, we *did* get everything straightened out after a while. My cruel, sadistic, just absolutely too terrible for words, captors, were Replings. Their arch-enemies were the Dimkats. We were on the planet Dawr, as you have probably by now almost guessed for certain sure. In fact, as one of those awful brutes explained to me, we had landed in the headquarters region of the Replings, a place called Dzocq Valley.

I tried to stop the two nasty slavers, but for all that I struggled and pleaded, they succeeded finally in getting me all untied and hustled me out of the pieplate. They were going to be in trouble. They'd been sent to earth to capture one of our stuck-up and independent women, all of whom are really very frustrated and unhappy except they won't admit it. What they really want is to be beaten, mastered, subdued, commanded, whipped, punished, scolded, broken, humiliated, whipped, hit, kicked, thrashed, smitten, socked, batted around a bit, have their clothes pulled off, get shoved about, made to whimper, cry, beg, plead —

Pardon me a minute, I can't go on just now.

Mmmhh, uhh, ooh, ahh.

Phew!

Well, as I was saying in that serious philosophical discussion above, hmm, I think you have the idea by now.

Of course, Dawrian women like that stuff too. But they get it from girlhood onward, and by the time they're much past their tenth or eleventh year they're pretty well played out. Mature fast, age fast. You know how it is. Heh, heh. Too bad.

But those haughty and frigid earthwomen (they all are, you know, know you, are all they) are just begging (inside, where it doesn't show) to be punched, booted in the ass, elbowed in the ribs and et cetera.

Where was I?

Oh, I was in the Dzocq Valley.

I told the horrid nasty Replings who I was.

"Norm Johnman," I told the two Replings, sticking out my soft pink hand.

They looked at it in scorn, exchanged a few whispered sibilants, then to me turned again once. "We are slave-traders," the bigger and brawnier and more muscular and tough and nasty and rough-looking one with the calloused hands and the big scar on his tough masterful cheek and the strong rough hands and the deep masterful voice said. "My name bein' by way of Mill Vergor and my buddy here's Verg Miller. Our boss's name is Mern Vigger and he's gonna be madder'n hell and he won't take any more of this stuff. Last time we brought in a drag queen by mistake he had us on the carpet for half a *thooq*!"

"Yeah," Verg Miller took over from Mill Vergor. Verg was broader-shouldered and more muscular, with rippling sinews and big calloused strong hands and hairy arms and a funny little snaggle-toothed grin that nobody in the world could possibly have resisted and his hair all curly was where it from underneath the brim of his turban it snuck out mischievously.

"That *gooth* of a boss," Mill Vergor took back over, "he axed us where we got the drag queen and we told him and he said, 'Look, just stay the *noothq* out of leather bars and make sure of the merchandise before you drag it all the way across 47 quintillion *qoonths* of space here to Dawr!' And I said, 'Well, I've never been so insulted in my life, you Mern Vigger you, and if you don't treat me better I'm going to quit this rotten job and go on *thnorg* stamps if I have to.' Well, that told him!"

Well, as you probably know by now from reading the 1980 Dawr story, the 1979 Dawr story, the 1978 Dawr story, the 1977 Dawr story, the 1976 Dawr story, the 1975 Dawr story, and all the rest of them, I fit in just perfectly here on Dawr. At first I thought I wanted to go back to nasty old earth.

Well, that shows how much I knew!

On earth, all the men are nothing but a bunch of pansies!

And all the women are nothing but a bunch of stuck-up, horrid, conceited bitches. Frigid, too! Every last one of them!

Yes, they are, too! Don't answer back!

Oh, but here on Dawr, well, here they know how to make a woman happy! Or, should I say, I know how to make a woman happy. *Blush!*

Well, after a while Verg Miller and Mill Vergor and I got to be marvelous chums. Every once in a while we'd go down to the slave pens and buy us a slave girl and have some fun breaking her. The only trouble was, they were all Dawrians. Some were Repling women, some were Dimkats, but like all good Dawrian women they'd been humiliated, beaten, shoved around, bruised, tied up, humiliated, shamed, humbled, hurt, harried, tormented, and all of that other good stuff every since they were babies. They were very happy and fulfilled but most of the fun was used up.

One day Verg Miller and Mill Vergor and I were sitting at a rough wooden table at the Golden Archer's near Cabot Lodge in Dzocq Valley. We were complaining a lot, drinking *thnrooqberry* mead and I was looking from Verg to Mill and from Mill to Verg, trying to decide which one of my marvelous chums I liked better (it was very hard to decide, if you take meaning *my*), when in walked — I should say, swaggered — the nastiest, meanest, cruellest-looking, most horrible, vicious, outrageous-appearing man I have every eyes laid on.

Incredible!

He had the robes and dagger of a Dawrian slave-raider. From the cut of his bur-noose he was a Dimkat, and from the looks of him he was just back from a trip to

earth. He just had that look to him. You know. Kind of smirky and smarmy.

He turned to face a waiter scurrying up and commanded him, "Bring me a Big Morc, scoundrel!"

The waiter scurried away.

The newcomer reached under his burnoose and drew out a thong. He started pulling on it. I could see that the other end was through the turquoise dust characteristic of the Dzocq Valley dragging. The slaver tugged at the rope and there came staggering and stumbling through the entryway an earth woman.

Haughty and contemptuous, sneering with disdain (and, I assure you, frigidity), she stood erect. She was wearing the latest voile fichu frock and patent-leather pumps, and shiny tight stockings and she had long pointy fingernails and her eyes looked all red and runny like she'd been crying or trying not to cry and getting mad and he had her hands tied together behind her back and that pulled her shoulders back so her headlights were pointing through her crepe chennile and her eyes flashed angrily at the slaver and he cuffed her once right across the chops and she had this choke collar riveted around her neck (I thought that was just the nicest part of it all — I've always liked those a whole lot). I could see that she wasn't sealed yet to her permanent Dawrian master because the Dawrians mark their slave-women with a little golden ornament that looks something like a beautiful jewelled ice-pick that they drive through the septum so they can drag their slaves around by the nose when they feel like making them really happy and satisfied the way *all* women, *really* want to be treated inside only most of them won't admit it because they're secretly frigid and they don't want anybody to know it.

Well I flashed a look from one of my marvelous chums to the other and I decided to have a little fun with this new arrival. Besides, I had got just a little bit tipsy on *thnrooqberry* mead, and this big new fellow made me want to capture his attention.

"Say there, slaver," I cried out.

He glared at me.

✓ "Want to sell that little bundle of jollies?" I asked coyly.

He snarled. "Who tries to buy a newly captured acquisition from the famous slaver Yan Blan?" he demanded.

I introduced myself and my marvelous chums, thinking all the while, *Yan Blan, the famous Yan Blan. Well, of all coincidences!* "I know that fresh merchandise is more valuable than shopworn goods," I conceded, "but I'd be willing to bid as much as fifty *fleerz* for her."

PERHAPS IT would well be for me I should explain you the Dawrian monetary system. Their smallest unit, pressed in white enamel coins of shape rectangular, are called *chiclets*. Seventeen and a quarter *chiclets* make a *dentyne*. The *dentyne* is pink and rectangular, about 3.72566 centimeters long by .7654321 centimeters wide and not as thick as you think. Nine and three-eighths *dentyne*s make a *wrigley*, which is long, flat, and gray. Five *wrigleys* make a *bazooka* (round and about the size of a good cats-eye shooter). And four *bazookas* make a *fleerz*.

There are also several obsolete units of Dawrian currency, the best known being the *beeman*. At expensive saloons, prices are still sometimes in *beemans* quoted. A *beeman* was worth a doubled *fleerz* plus three and an eighth *chiclets*.

By bidding fifty *fleerz* for the flaring-eyed floozy, I was offering roughly \$1.85 in American moolah.

"Fifty *fleerz*!" Yan Blan blanched. "A mighty price for this bit of baggage,

fellow. But I won't part with her unbroken. But here," he fumbled beneath his burnoose, "just to show that I have no hard feelings, let's all just share a little of my *jrrtolk*."

The slave behind him seemed to become alarmed at this, and her head shook at us. Yan Blan noticed this and jerked at her tether to quiet her. She managed, somehow, to conceal her pleasure and gratitude at the treatment.

Verg Miller and Mill Vergor and I each picked up a piece of Yan Blan's *jrrtolk* and a bit of it consumed. Too late we realized what the slave had tried unsuccessfully to us warn about. This wasn't the tasteful, refreshing original *jrrtolk*. It was the phony stuff that had been making the rounds lately. Aargh! Foully betrayed! My last thoughts, as the hard wooden table uprushed my forehead to meet, were to wondering be whether this was the wooden *foulsbane*, an imitation *jrrtolk* that would merely make us fall asleep for a few hours and awaken with a sick headache, or whether it was the deadly poisonous *shanaranaranaranarananaranarananarananara swordwort* having once consumed which the deluded victim would never be the same.

All thanks be to the gods Tur, Klono and Foo-Foo! Twas merely the mildly miasmic *foulsbane*. We recovered.

But — in what surroundings!

It was a prison cell with walls of dried *gostok-dung*, a ceiling that dripped green, and creepy, slithery things that scuttered and swirled across the filthy floor. The cell was so dark that we couldn't tell what the things were — and happier we were not to know! Something hopped across my outstretched leg and stopped to perform a disgusting act. It was a *gostok*, and it was distimming a dosh!

"Do either of you marvelous chums know where we being?" I asked.

"Black Rock," Verg Miller said.

"The infamous gaol on Three Mile Isle," Mill Vergor added.

An eerie green glow emanated from the walls, ceiling, and floor. A couple of disgusting critturs hopped onto my kneecaps. "Yech!" I cursed colorfully. They were little Dimkatlian caterpillars out hunting mutant *gnurrs*. "Yech!" I repeated again once more. "You think there's any way we can get from here out of?"

"Sure," one of my marvelous chums said. "Listen."

I cupped my hand to my ear but could nothing hear.

"Get a whiff o' that," my other marvelous chum suggested.

Snuff, I went. *Sniff*. *Snurfle*. "I don't hear anything or smell anything," I hissed.

"Ahah! That proves they're here!"

"Who is?"

"No, *what* is?"

"What's on second," my marvelous chum supplied.

"Basingstoke," the other chipped in.

Slowly I turned. Step by step I attempted to follow their reasoning. Useless it was. Utterly useless. They were like a pair of the infamous Replingian *wytts*. "I'm at a loss," I admitted.

"We're surrounded by the strange mutant beasts of Three Mile Isle," the Dawrian voices ground back. "*Raats!* And *pyggs!* Ook!"

"What are those?" I riposted.

"Horrible monstrosities too revolting even to begin to describe! Let me tell you all about them. First of all, the *raat* can be distinguished from the *pygg* by . . ."

He halted.

"I think a guard approaching is," my other marvelous chum yielded.

"Quick, then — just tell me how you know there are *raats* and *pyggs* here," I gallumphed.

"Tis simple!" the Dawrian supplemented. "You sniffed and nothing you smelt, is that not right?"

"Yes," I chortled.

"Don't interrupt! And you listened and heard nary a sound, did you not, hey, answer up now!"

"Yes, but —"

"I warned you not to interrupt!" he high-hurdled, smashing me alongside the bridge of the nose with a calloused and horny fist. I crashed deliciously among the bugs. "You *thnroorq!*" he rectangled. "That's because the Dawrian *raat* makes no sound, and the Dawrian *pygg* possesseth no odor! What more proof do you kneed of their presence!"

"Aye, oh, ah, em, yum, yep," the other slave-trader chimney-swept. "And where're there be Dawrian *raats* and *pyggs*, there follow always them razor-sharp-clawed critturs, *wytts*. Feel around, Norm Johnman, and see aye ye kin locate some 'mongst the *bugs* on the floor!"

"Stop interrupting," my two marvelous chums herringed in harmony.

We searched around mongst the Dawrian *bugs*, shoving aside little caterpillars, *raats*, *pyggs* and *gnurrs* until we were all armed with razor-clawed *wytts*.

"Help! Help!" Verg Miller screamed, then.

"Ah, sharrup!" we heard a guard yell in rejoinder.

"It's this daffy earthman," Mill Vergor saltcellared. "He's gone mad! He's going to destroy us all! Help!"

"By the brazen blips of Klono," the guard abplanalped, "all right, stand away from the door while I subdue the malefactor in accord with the Uniform Code of Dawrian Justice." We backed away from the door while he opened it and stepped into the cell holding high the aspidistra. Mill Vergor and Verg Miller attacked him with their *wytts*. I tried to aid but discovered that I had only a half-*wytt* to attack with.

Even so, we managed to bind the guard in his own Frederick's of Black Rock negligee and leave him in a corner of the cell where *pyggs*, *raats*, *wytts*, little caterpillars, *gnurrs* and all other manner of exotic *bugs* crept and scratched. Ho, ho, I thought as we departed, slamming the cell-door behind us.

We set out down the main thoroughfare of Black Rock. It was full of bawling barkers, barking bawlers, shifty-eyed Replings and Dimkats eyeing each other malevolently, and drinking establishments where Dawrians quaffed beakers full of *thnroopquery* blog. I pulled my marvelous chums past a number of these and we finally found our way to the main town pentangle.

There in the middle of the pentangle, lit luridly by guttering cressets and smoking torches, had been erected a platform on which a batch of slaves knelt for examination. It was the famous Dawrian slave market of Three Mile Isle.

I made my way down an aisle, thinking, *I'll see who's for sale*. And there, suddenly, I beheld her! The golden pick had been driven through her septum! She was ready for sealing to her one true master! A horrid Dawrian was examining her, forcing her to show him her teeth and like similar comparable analogous intimate parts. The Dawrian was covered with dripping acne sores. His teeth were buck. His nose was huge and scabrous. He moved with a disgusting clumsy way.

The slave, haughty as ever, squirmed and shrunked away from his touch.

"He-he-he," the Dawrian lintelled, "ye're a fine one, you cutey! I'll have a dandy time showing you the ropes, I will. If you take my meaning. He-he-he!"

The slave shranked away.

I turned and found my two marvelous chums at my side. "Who be the fiend pawing yon piece of merchandise?" I asked.

Verg Miller rubbed his chin. "Tis, methinks, the infamous slave-trader Llenning di Vad."

"Aye, it be he. He it bè. It he be, meseemeth to me," Mill Vergor trumpeted in agreement.

"Hmph," we heard the horrifying Llenning de Vad rasp out, "I'll bid three den-tynes, two wrigleys and half a chiclet for this'n."

"Tis nae enow," the canny Yan Blan countered.

"Hah! Well, I may come up a couple more wrigleys, but ye'll have to settle for a lower percentage then, and I want all the subsidiary rights plus an option on —"

"Fiend!" Yan Blan tapdanced furiously. "Monster! Villain! Criminal! Cheat! Crook! Bum! Beast! Counterrevolutionary running dog lackey! Elwood!"

"What!" di Vad's eyes blazed, he snorted flame, his skin grew livid with rage.

"That is the ultimate insult! No man may call me that and live!"

He reached into his scabbard and pulled out a fearsome weapon, a tool of torture and destruction so hideous in its effects as to have been banned even on Dawr. Twas an old Ace-brand Lotr! Even I, Norm Johnman, recoiled in horror.

But Yan Blan was not to be outdone. Drawing aside his own tattered and stained burnoose he brandished a terrible Authorized Uhrb. Inwardly I moaned at the sight.

The two slave-traders, di Vad and Blan, began smiting each other with their weapons of mass destruction. The thunderous reverberations could be heard throughout Three Mile Isle.

I took advantage of the distraction to sneak past the combattants and grasp the tether to which the slave girl was bound. I tugged at it and she was forced to tumble from the stage. I spun on my heel and asked one of my marvelous chums where we could secret ourselves nearby.

"There is a town called Marchant not far on the other side of Three Mile Isle," one of the Dawrians gritted. "I know a smith there. He'll take us in."

"Splendid!" I lited.

As we sped across the countryside riding double on a couple of giant mutated clams I casually asked the earth girl her name. Her eyes blazed at me and she said contemptuously, "Hester Prynne. That monster Yan Blan captured me near my home in Bronxville, not far from the Hawthorne Circle."

"Ah, I know it well," I purred.

Before too short a time had passed we crossed the Straits of Dyre that separate Three Mile Isle from the mainland and made our way to the village indicated by my two marvelous chums.

We continued to ride our mutated clams down the dusty central thoroughfare of the burg. From time to time I would cast a casual glance at Hester. She was typical of earth women. She was beautiful in a cold way, with a beautiful face, beautiful eyes, beautiful nose, beautiful lips and beautiful hair. Her skin was beautiful. She had a beautiful figure with beautiful arms and beautiful hands, beautiful breasts that peeped beautifully from her slave's rags. Her body was beautiful, and she had beautiful hips, beautiful thighs, beautiful knees, beautiful calves and beautiful feet. To bottom it all off, her toes were beautiful and her toenails were beautiful.

What a sight! I hope that I have had the power to convey to you the full dimensions of her beauty.

And yet, I could tell that she was unhappy — had been unhappy all her life, for as a woman of her country and era she was frustrated. She had been forced to compete with men as an equal. Poor thing! She had been forced, I suppose, even as a child, to attend school with boys, to listen to the same lectures, study the

same books, prepare the same assignments and compete for the same grades!

Later, she had been forced to compete with men for jobs, to socialize with men as an equal, to engage with men in conversation as one human being to another, discussing the affairs of the day, her interests, her aspirations, her fears!

Never had she been granted the magnificent gift which only a truly enlightened man (such as I!) could grant! Never had she been humbled, broken, humiliated, forced to grovel, to beg, to abase herself, to whimper, to show the innermost cravings of her true womanly self for the masterful domination of a truly overbearing male!

I took pity on the poor creature even though I knew it was really her own fault because she was secretly frigid.

My musings were burst in upon by my marvelous chum Verg Miller. "Aye, Johnman, see ye, 'tis yonder place that we have sought all across the burning sands and raging seas of this our holy pilgrimage!"

I stared.

Indeed, it was a marvelous vision! A small section of woods had survived in the very heart of Marchant, and now we were near them. Most of the trees native to the planet Dawr are strange varieties unlike any of the familiar growths found on the earth, but a few varieties such as the common chesnut tree are common to both planets.

Mill Vergor, too, pointed. Their friend was hard at work and did not even look up from his blacksmith's anvil and tongs. He was working on some sort of royal trapping, a circlet or corona to be used in a Dawrian royal pageant.

I found myself moved to extemporise a brief verse. "Under the spreading chesnut tree," I declaimed originally, "the village smithy stands. A great and mighty man is he with large and sinewy hands."

"You've got it wrong," Hester Prynne snapped frigidly. "It isn't 'great and mighty man,' it's supposed to be—"

"Silence!" I silenced her.

Our clams had now reached the entrance of Thorin's business establishment and we threw their reins across a hickery hitching post. Mill Vergor and Verg Miller climbed from their clams at the same time that I slid from the shell of mine and dragged Hester, haughty and frustrated, behind me.

My marvelous chums introduced me to Thorin. I extended my hand in a conventional greeting and he rejoined, "Nanu-nanu."

The blacksmith and my two slave-trader friends made their way to get us a cooling decanter of *qthoonqberry* malteds. I tugged Hester by her jewelled nosepick near to the anvil. "Now, me proud beauty," I sneered at the poor quivering creature, "let us perform the ceremony of binding of slave to master, as is known to all true Dawrians. This is the ceremony that will demean, debase, disgust, dishearten, and humiliate you. Thus will you find true happiness at last, and probably overcome your frigidity into the bargain."

"Jerrypournelle," she whimpered.

"Let's see," I said, "for starters I suppose you might simply place a suitable crown upon my brow and kneel before me, acknowledging me as your absolute monarch, sovereign, prince, king, emperor, and deity. *Ich und Gott*, as we used to in the old country say."

I looked around for something suitable to use in this little introductory ceremony. My eye alighted upon the golden circlet that the proprietor had been working on a while before. He wouldn't mind my appropriating it for a little while, I was sure.

Pulling Hester by her nosepick so she had no choice but to do my bidding, I

heroically and courageously and admirably forced her down onto her knees. Seizing Thorin the smith's corona, I shoved it into her hands and commanded her to raise it and place it upon my head.

Out of one corner of my eye I could see the three other Dawrians approaching us with a huge jug of *qthqooqthqberry* kool-aid in their hands. Casually I noted that the beverage had been seized from earth, as it still had stencilled on the side of the jug, *Consigned to People's Temple, Jonestown, Guyana*. Ah, these rascal-y Dawrians, I thought to myself.

Hester was unwillingly raising the golden circlet as I tugged violently on her nosepick. I smiled down at her with hatred and pity, with love and contempt. "Place it on my brow and admit your debasement," I commanded her.

From the three men approaching I heard a cry.

"Stop," hologrammed Thorin the smith, "that corona is my experimental turn-about model!"

But it was too late! Hester has placed the circlet upon the brow of Norm Johnman. There was a hot flash, everything turned red for a moment, I felt strangely disoriented, tumbling, spinning through space. I instinctively squoozed my eyes shut. I felt strange all over. Between my legs, where my trylon and perispheres had been all my life, was a sudden, strange sense of vacancy. And my magnificent, muscular, manly, flat, hairy chest, seemed in a trice to have become peculiarly soft, and hairless, and heavily rounded.

But I had not time to contemplate the weird alteration in my physiology, for there was a blinding bolt of pain through my nose. My eyes crossed, violently and involuntarily. The world collapsed into a weird double image of horror and despair as my orbs managed to focus moistly on the glittering, jewel-encrusted, golden pick that protruded from the sides of my septum. ●

MY FRIEND OVA HAMLET

by Richard A. Lupoff

The earliest Ova Hamlet story that I've seen is one called "In the Kitchen," that appeared in *Fantastic* magazine for October, 1969. However, a biographical note with the story mentions an earlier Hamlet story, "Incident in the Dessert Queue at the Joss Mansions Cafeteria." This earlier effort was supposed to have appeared in *New Worlds* magazine for December, 1965.

My copy of *New Worlds* for that month contains eight stories, but none of them have that title, nor do any of them bear the by-line of Ova Hamlet. But Ova is a notorious leg-puller and perhaps she was there all along, lurking behind some such pseudonym as Michael Moorcock or James Colvin. Come to think of it, no one that I know of has ever seen Hamlet, Colvin, and Moorcock in the same room at the same time. And experienced conspiracy buffs will tell you what that means!

Ova and her first husband, Sir Duncan Hamlet, became parents of female quints in 1966, when Ova was just 17. Following the tragic death of her husband (run over by a

steamroller in Canton, Ohio, in October, 1975), she married the famous author of such science fiction works as *Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension* and *2BR02B*. (A published report of Ova's second wedding gives her birth date as 1929 instead of 1949 — those who know Ova know just how absurd this version is!)

While Ova Hamlet is not a prolific author, she has produced a series of popular stories over the years. Several of these were collected in an illustrated edition, *The Ova Hamlet Papers* (Pennyfarthing Press, San Francisco, 1979). "Nosepickers of Daur" is Ova's first work in several years, but I'm sure that as new targets for parody raise their vulnerable heads, she will limber up her ancient Oliver Visible typewriter and get back into action. At least once in a while.

Otherwise poor old Oliver Visible will spin in his grave.

Incidentally, a number of people have accused Ova Hamlet, during these past dozen years or more, of being the hidden

force behind the by-line "Richard A. Lupoff." As such, she would have to be the author of a couple of dozen books including *Sword of the Demon* and *Space War Blues*, published in recent years, and several more that should appear in 1981 and 1982, including *Circumpolar!*, *Lovecraft's Book*, and *Sun's End*. She would also be the editor of the anthology series *What If?*

Anybody who would believe that would believe that she uses the "Lupoff"

pseudonym to write book reviews for *Starship* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Washington Post*.

And if there's anybody around who's willing to believe that, I would like him or her to come along with me and give moral support and encouragement in my job interview with Billy Martin. I'm really serious about my quest for the third baseman's job with the Oakland A's.

Ken Doggett timestopper

Eureka!" the Professor cried. "It's done!"

"What's done?" asked his beautiful female assistant. She tossed her head so that her flaxen hair settled in a whirl to her shoulders.

"My machine!" the Professor calmed himself long enough to emit a sigh. "Haven't you been paying attention? I've created a machine that will stop time. And it must work! It has to! The equations are correct!"

The assistant nodded blankly. Then she busied herself unwrapping a fresh stick of gum to add to the huge wad that already kept her perfect mouth in busy rhythm. "You've made a time machine," she cried.

"No, no, no!" the Professor cried, tearing at his wild, uncombed hair. "Not a time machine, you stupid little ninny! A machine that stops time!"

"Oh," said the assistant, her pretty face still a blank. "What's the difference?"

"When I throw this lever," the Professor explained as he grasped the protruding instrument and ignored her question, "all time will come to a complete halt. But . . ." he raised a finger — "only I will know it, because only I control the machine. To everyone else, time will seem to move normally, while I move around unfettered by its restrictions. But from my viewpoint they will seem frozen, imprisoned motionless by the universe's headlong dash toward increasing entropy."

The assistant had produced a hairbrush, and was running it through her silken locks. "What?" she said.

"Never mind," said the Professor with an impatient wave of his hand. "I will demonstrate." With that he pulled the lever and disappeared.

The assistant waited a long, long time, perhaps as much as fifteen or twenty seconds, but the Professor failed to reappear. She wriggled over to the machine and stood, hands on curvaceous hips, and scowled at its control panel.

"Golly," she cursed, hurling the foul invective at the impassive machine with all the venom of an unhatched Indian Cobra. "Surely the Professor would not have made such a bad mistake. Surely he would know that as he stopped time, he would also stop the very photons in their tracks; and that it would be ever so dark, and if he got turned around, he might never find his way back to the machine.

"And surely he would not have forgotten that the only breathable air he carried was what was in his lungs at the time (all used up), and that all the air outside his

body would for him be composed of inactive atoms and molecules which would not only give him no sustenance if he tried to inhale them (probably proving toxic also), but would have provided little or no atmospheric pressure to balance that which was inside his body. And he might even explode!"

She ran the brush absently through her hair once more as a frown troubled her lovely countenance. "Surely he would have considered all that." And she hopped up on a nearby counter and prepared to wait for him at least another minute or two, her faith in the professor unshakeable. But still he failed to return.

Another frown crept onto her face, and she held her hairbrush motionless for an instant, forgetting even to chew her gum. Then she shrugged as both brush and gum went into motion at once.

"And he called me stupid." ●

Ken Doggett

For the past five years I've been writing as a hobby while working full time as a consumer electronics technician (that's Newspeak for "TV Repairman"). I've also been trained in engineering and hold a First Class FCC License. Some might say I'm an underachiever.

Of late I've been working on a series of stories whose main character is a member of a fading and unorganized clique called

"Antisocials." I hope later to publish these short stories as a novel. "The Time Stopper" is my second professional sale; unfortunately, my first one was to *Galaxy*, which folded before publishing my story. I've also placed a story in *Empire* SF and have one soon to be published in *Hands In The Dark*.

Beyond that my life has been interesting only to me.

DO IT NOW! SUBSCRIBE!

AMAZING/FANTASTIC • Box 642 • Scottsdale, AZ 85252

Yes, please enter my subscription to:

AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

☐ ONE FULL YEAR — SIX ISSUES ONLY \$9.00

☐ TWO YEARS @ \$16 ☐ THREE YEARS @ \$25

☐ new subscription ☐ renewal

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

My check payable to AMAZING/FANTASTIC for \$ _____ is enclosed

This rate applies only to the USA and its possessions. For Canada & Mexico add \$2 per year for extra postage. Elsewhere, \$15 per year. Your first issue of AMAZING/FANTASTIC will be mailed within 8 weeks of receipt of your order.

LOCUS

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FIELD

14TH YEAR OF
PUBLICATION

FIVE TIME
HUGO WINNER

In its monthly issues, *LOCUS* covers the science fiction field completely. For professionals, there are up-to-date market reports, news of editorial changes, stories on sales, and various columns on the craft of writing. For readers, complete lists of sf books published, reviews, media notes, forthcoming books, upcoming conventions, convention reports, contents of forthcoming anthologies and magazines, reader surveys, *LOCUS* Awards and much more.

Isaac Asimov: "There is no way, for anyone fascinated by science fiction, to get out of reading *LOCUS*. It is the *Time* magazine and Walter Winchell of the field. It misses nothing, tells everything, keeps you abreast and in the swim, and I wouldn't be without it.—And I won't be for I have put down the money for a lifetime subscription."

Ben Bova: "*LOCUS* is the science fiction newsletter. No one who is interested in the field should be without it."

Marion Zimmer Bradley: "*LOCUS* is where I look first for shop talk—it is the real trade paper of science-fiction. There have been times when I first heard through *LOCUS*, (not my agent) that a new book of mine is on the stands."

Algis Budrys: "Without a doubt, the single most valuable periodical within the SF community; a labor of devotion, a bulletin board, a monument."

Arthur C. Clarke: "*LOCUS* is the only periodical I read from cover to cover—including adverts!"

Fritz Leiber: "*LOCUS* has been both a pioneering publication and a consistently high performer. This little magazine sets the standards for accuracy and scope in its reporting of the news in the science fiction and fantasy publishing fields, and for level-headed interpretation of that news. I read it regularly."

Michael Moorcock: "As one who is notorious for his dislike of the social aspects of the SF world, I can say fairly that *LOCUS* is the only journal I know which retains a clear-sighted and impartial perspective on it. It's the only

SF journal that I see regularly or would wish to see regularly."

The New York Times: "Anyone whose interest in SF extends beyond reading it to wanting to read about it should be aware of *LOCUS*."

Frederik Pohl: "Charlie Brown has been a close friend for nearly twenty years, so anything I might say is suspect—but *LOCUS* is the most important publication in science fiction today."

Judy-Lynn del Rey: "*LOCUS* has become the *Publishers Weekly* of science fiction. It's must reading for anyone and everyone at all involved in the field."

Lester del Rey: "*LOCUS* is the one indispensable source of information for every reader and writer of science fiction. That's why I have a lifetime subscription."

Robert Silverberg: "*LOCUS* is indispensable."

Theodore Sturgeon: "Anyone who is remotely interested in the many aspects of SF must—I said *must*—be, or get, familiar with *LOCUS*."

Peter Straub: "I think it's the most *pertinent* magazine I get, and I'm very grateful that I subscribed."

The Wall Street Journal: "... the science fiction trade magazine ..."

Roger Zelazny: "For professionals and devotees alike, *LOCUS* is the world's most important publication about science fiction."

LOCUS Publications, P.O. Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119

U.S.A.	CANADA	OVERSEAS	INSTITUTIONAL
\$15.00 for 12 issues (2nd class)	\$16.50 for 12 issues (2nd class)	\$16.50 for 12 issues (see mail)	\$16.50/wr in U.S. (2nd class)
\$28.00 for 24 issues (2nd class)	\$31.00 for 24 issues (2nd class)	\$31.00 for 24 issues (see mail)	\$18.00/wr in Canada (2nd class)
\$21.00 for 12 issues (1st class)	\$21.00 for 12 issues (1st class)	\$27.00 for 12 issues (air mail)	\$22.50/wr USA/Canada (1st class)
\$40.00 for 24 issues (1st class)	\$40.00 for 24 issues (1st class)	\$52.00 for 24 issues (air mail)	\$18.00/wr Overseas (see mail)
			\$28.50/wr Overseas (air mail)

All subscriptions are payable in U.S. funds. Canadians, please use bank or postal money orders. Institutional subscriptions are the only ones we will bill.

Enclosed is: \$ _____ ☐ New ☐ Renewal Sample Copy—\$1.50

Name _____

Street or Box No. _____

City _____ State or Province _____ Zip _____

JAMES PATRICK KELLY

Last Contact

See what the little children do . . .

Two angels of death prowled through the woods, enthralled by a timeless dream of carnage and glory. Minds and bodies tingled with the terrible romance of their hunt. They did not hurry; they knew that the world was full of victims.

One halted and squinted up at the canopy formed by the grappling of two pines. He settled the butt of his weapon against his shoulder, sighted down the long barrel and squeezed the trigger. The gun made a noise like a cat's sneeze.

"You missed," said Joey. The blue jay hopped from one branch to another and eyed them nervously.

Pierce cocked his new gun. "You try then."

"Too high." The spell was momentarily broken; they reverted to ten-year-olds. "Waste of BB's."

Joey's gun was a hand-me-down standard model whose stock could boast no molded plastic steer head or lariat tracteries. Pierce was convinced that these were totems of the greater power of his gun. He raised it and fired again.

The jay dove squawking from its perch and fluttered into the leafy shadows of a nearby beech.

"I think I winged it."

"Sure." Joey touched the muzzle of his gun to his forehead in a mock salute.

In the city they would never have chosen each other as playmates. But in this station wagon town with its estates and riding clubs and conservation lands, where most adults were dedicated to the pursuit of a childless happiness, they had no choice. Because they had never known anything different they called their fierce and incessant competition friendship. Pierce was the apparent leader of the two. He was larger than Joey and better coordinated. His tangle of curly red hair was as startling as a clown's wig. Since he lacked protective coloration he had become a talker, a joker, a child at ease in the center of attention. Joey was as tall as Pierce but there was too much bone, not enough muscle to him; you could count his ribs. He was dark, taciturn and quirky. Too intelligent for his years, he already had an adult talent for the deflating gibe. Although rarely an initiator, he usually found a way to improve on Pierce's plans.

Deeper in the woods they came upon a patch of skunk cabbage which was

strangling a sluggish brook. They followed the water to where it widened to a shallow pond, too small and too remote to have been ruined with improvements. A scum of algae floated on its surface; its bed was lined with fetid mud which sucked and squirmed like a living thing when stepped on. Joey gazed into the still brown depths and his fantasies began to churn once more.

FOR WEEKS the lander had waited, monitoring the dim hungry thoughts of salamanders, crows, chipmunks and raccoons. It followed the boys' approach with greater interest, system after system surging on line until it was as aware as it had been at the moment of the crash.

"I'VE NEVER been here before," said Pierce.

Joey nodded but was not listening. He leaned his gun against a broken stump and wiped the sweat from his hands onto his cutoffs. "There's frogs." He snuck forward, aimed and fired.

"Get it?" Pierce stepped closer to the shore and three frogs launched into the water and burrowed into the leaf-covered muck. Contemplating what must happen next, he was wrenched by an inexplicable and embarrassing sadness. He stooped to retie a sneaker that was not loose. His eyes burned. Joey was already seeking new prey, however, and so when he stood he banished all thoughts of genial cartoon animals and Disney's sentimental nature movies. "There must be hundreds of them here."

Joey's gun sneezed again. "You can't kill them just by looking, you know." He kicked through some brush near the bank, bent over and picked up a newly-made corpse by one leg. Pierce stared at it without comprehension. Joey began to swing it around and around like a pouch full of marbles. When he let it go it whirled at Pierce and flopped, belly-up, at his feet. Joey laughed as if at a dirty joke. "Come on. I'm two up on you already."

So they made a game of the slaughter. Joey soon lost his advantage. Once Pierce got started he killed at a manic rate, running from shot to shot, his pale face frozen in a joyless grin. He had succeeded in metamorphosing the frogs from living creatures to moving targets. Joey's imagination would not let him off so easily. He stayed to watch; there was something about death throes that at once horrified and fascinated him. If the last frantic thrashing was particularly prolonged, his eyes would glaze and he might shudder as if imagining what it would feel like to have a cannon shot slam into his chest.

THE LANDER had tapped into each boy's mind and thus viewed these events not only from its own perspective but theirs as well. It did not have the capacity to judge them, only to record their thoughts and actions with unblinking machine accuracy.

IN LESS THAN an hour they had annihilated the population on their side of the pond. While Pierce made one final sweep, Joey squatted on a rock, pulled a string of chewing gum from the wad in his mouth, wrapped it around his finger and sucked it back in.

"Joey! Over here." Pierce was surveying a tree trunk which had fallen downstream of the outlet. "Here's where we cross." He scrambled across the bobbing span. Joey followed cautiously. He was reaching for Pierce's outstretched hand when water brimmed over the log and his foot slipped. He had stepped ankle-deep into mud before Pierce could haul him onto solid ground.

"You all right?"

Propping himself on the bank, he rinsed his foot, leather jogging shoe and all, in the pond. "Now I have to go home and change."

"Oh, come on." Pierce stifled a mocking laugh. "You're not going to let a little mud spoil this."

Joey stood but made no reply. His shoe oozed when he stepped on it.

"We'll change the game: whoever shoots the biggest one is the winner. How about that?"

Joey glared. "Your foot isn't wet." He picked up his gun and stalked off. "One shot each, then we go. One."

He was so angry that he did not see the old bullfrog that lurked in the swamp grass until he stumbled over it. It jumped for the pond but he dropped his gun and pounced. He needed both hands to hold his prize; it was over eleven inches long from head to toe.

Pierce stared oddly when he presented the desperately struggling frog for confirmation. "It's not dead."

Joey flushed, dashed the frog to the ground and stamped on it with his dirty shoe. Again. And again.

"You're gross, Joey, you know that? Dis-gust-ing."

Joey fetched his gun and retreated from the shore to a spot where he could watch Pierce hunt. It was then that he discovered the lander.

It was at the center of a depression about four yards wide. The surface of the depression was scorched and partly fused. Only a fraction of the lander itself was visible; the rest was buried. When Pierce arrived he saw a dome about a foot in diameter and eight inches high. Its skin was blackened and pitted like concrete.

"Maybe somebody had a campfire here," he said doubtfully. He licked his forefinger and touched it to the lander. "Not hot now."

"Look." Joey pointed to the circular seam just above ground level. "This whole thing probably opens up."

"You think it fell off an airplane?"

"Or a rocket."

"In Bedford?"

Joey wiped his hands on his pants until long after they were dry. "Think we should try to open it?"

At this point the lander took defensive measures. Having already analyzed the organization of their brains, it began to disrupt the functioning of their hippocampi, stripping them of short term memory. They could clearly recall their ninth birthdays, the egg salad sandwiches they had eaten for lunch and crossing the outlet, but the previous three minutes eluded them. There followed a bizarre dance, a perseveration rag. They hovered around the lander like moths fluttering around a light: discovering it, examining it, speculating on its origins... rediscovering, reexamining, speculating again.

They might have been trapped for hours had not fatigue saved them. First Joey, then Pierce wandered out of the scorched depression and sprawled against the trunk of a pine tree. Joey scraped away the ground cover of needles without knowing what he was doing and gazed idly at the random scurrying of beetles as the fog in his mind dissipated.

"You ready to go?" he said.

"What?" Pierce started as if roused from a daydream. "Not yet." He planted the stock of his gun against the ground and pulled himself upright. "Not until I get my frog." He set off unsteadily for the pond.

Although the messenger was dead, its parts were well protected by its gel suit. It

had died in an agony of internal bleeding caused by the crash, worsened by its delirious search for help in earth's crushing gravity. The messenger looked nothing like a frog, really. It was as long as a squirrel. There was no clear differentiation between its arms and legs. It had a neck and deep set, lidless eyes. Had Pierce dared to pick it up he would have found that it weighed less than a pound.

But he was afraid to touch it. He saw only the smooth, mottled-green skin kept moist by the translucent gel, the vestigial webbing between the digits, the external eardrum. He nudged it with his foot; the residual shivering of the gel made the corpse seem to move.

"Hey, get a load of this."

They flipped it onto its back with guns then ran as if they had lit the fuse of a skyrocket. From a distance the wave pattern looked like a spasm of pain, but as it subsided the truth became obvious.

"Looks dead to me," said Pierce.

"Yeah." Joey was unenthusiastic about this new plaything; his surfeit of killing and the lander's mind tampering had left him feeling queasy.

"So I win."

Joey forced himself to look away from the messenger's face.

"Pierce, this is no frog."

"What is it then?"

"Besides, you never shot it."

Pierce smiled, pressed his gun into the gel and fired.

The lander reacted with the logical equivalent of horror: it disbelieved its telemetry. The organs of each messenger were to be preserved and recycled after death. For the lander this was not merely a rule of conduct; it was an immutable law of the universe observed by intelligent beings on all the worlds of the messenger commonwealth. Since the boys were clearly intelligent, the lander immediately severed its consciousness from its sensors and initiated procedures to identify the malfunction.

Pierce's shot penetrated the membrane of the messenger's suit but the BB was stopped by the gel. A jet of yellowish vapor spurted briefly. Sealant migrated toward the hole until it puckered, turned gold and closed.

Pierce was surprised and delighted by the miniature pyrotechnics he had set off; he pumped four more BB's into the gel. Joey forgot his nausea long enough to contribute two of his own. They noticed that with each shot the suit's defenses grew weaker.

"You smell something?" Pierce fired again.

"Like swimming pools?" Joey sat down abruptly. "I don't feel so good."

The pock-marked membrane succumbed all at once and gel boiled out. Tendrils of toxic gas crept along the ground. Pierce tugged Joey to his feet and together they staggered away from the twice-dead corpse.

The lander deduced the reliability of its input in time to witness the messenger's final destruction. Its programming did not include the concept of atrocity; its beneficent makers could never have conceived such a thing.

Harming the boys was unthinkable. Instead the lander wiped their short term memories once more and, as a fail-safe precaution, filled them with a moment of finger-curling, teeth-grinding pain which sank its roots deep into their remaining memories of the pond. Except for the fact that neither one ever touched a gun again, that was the extent of their suffering.

In the spring of the following year the lander dumped its record of the first contact into the memory banks of the relief ship. As it scanned the material, the replacement messenger on board began to envy its dead twin. It immediately quarantined the earth — and itself. No messenger had ever encountered

anything like this before. Mindless, innocent evil. Evil reduced to banality.

It tried to understand the paradox which infected its reason but, lacking mankind's natural immunities, the messenger of peace went quietly mad. ●

James Patrick Kelly

Since I am by vocation a dissembler some of what follows is, of course, untrue. I am 29, a homemaker, father to one daughter, husband to one wife. I have sold over eight stories to various sf magazines and anthologies; I am working on a novel. No hobbies at the moment; the leftovers of my days are gobbled up by the solar house

which I am finishing. It is located at North 4305.30 — West 7056.30. Would you believe that I once wrote resumes for a living? In the distant past I attended Schopenhauer Institute of Technology where I majored in pessimism. I whistle a lot. "Last Contact" is, of course, autobiographical.



Wabash Ave.

High above the street

Looking,

Pretending Sears Tower is Samson's
and all the other buildings, —

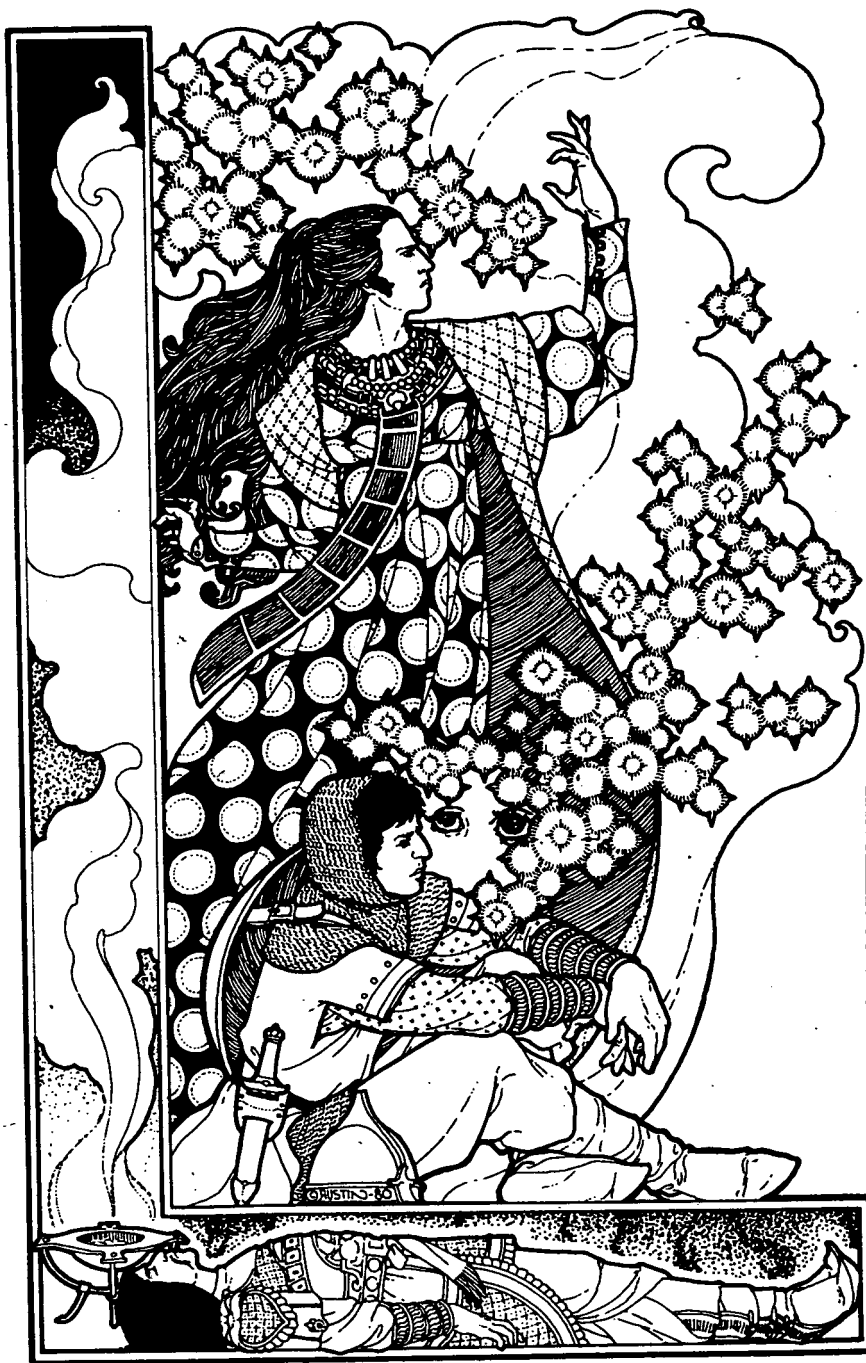
billets for demons,

the street sounds cackle like
dragons in an AIP film

The El's rumbling like trooptrains
in a Bergman fantasy.

And I, the one-eye, all wise greyman
looking down at my dark universe.

— Scott E. Green



Illustrated by Alicia Austin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT WASN'T so much, Ewen . . . I had to; don't you see? No. The gods damn it, no! Ewen . . ."

Dwassalar tossed feverishly on the low bed, tangling himself in the linens as his voice trailed off to a weak, jerky mumble. Taleera, slim arms folded, leaned against the chamber wall. Her coal-black hair was dampened by the late summer heat, and the white shift she wore hung limply, unstirred by her rigid body. Taleera's dark eyes alone were mobile, following every twitch of the stricken man.

A gray-bearded, skinny old healer kneeled at the bedside. His wrinkled face creased even more in concentration as his fingers probed here and there on the sick man's body, like a sculptor seeking flaws in his creation. After a while he sat back, his bony hands resting helplessly in his lap.

"Taleera, I think I've lived too long."

A faint smile touched the witch's lips.

"Everyone lives as long as he must, Cerlys. What makes you different?"

"Because if something looks like death, feels like death, and smells like death, is it too much to ask it to be death? Dwassalar makes a lie of everything I know of healing. He should be dead! I don't understand."

Taleera straightened, yawning, and stepped across the cut-stone floor to the open tower. The night-breeze toyed with her hair while she gazed past the outer wall to the open field surrounding the Great House of clan Tamre. The

the PASSING

Rick Parks

campfires of the gathered outliers mirrored the stars, blurring the lines separating earth and sky. Taleera felt herself drifting through space, stars above and below and the world far, far away. She forced herself away from the window.

"There's something else on the wind, Cerlys. I feel it. What does the clan say?"

The old man looked disgusted with the world and everything in it. "What do you think? The council summons a witch to end Dwassalar's pain, and after three weeks their chief is still suffering. They're angry." He paused for a moment and added, "There's talk that you're holding his soul to torment him."

"Is that what you think, Cerlys?"

"Taleera," he sighed, "An old fool once made the mistake of letting a witch-girl study with his apprentices. Who taught whom at the last? Thanks to you I no longer have my ignorance to comfort me."

The witch smiled a bitter smile.

"That can't be said of Tamre. Will my life be forfeit for Dwassalar's pain? Or is it that simple?"

Cerlys refused to meet her eyes.

"Nothing is ever that simple," he said. "Dwassalar dies without heir, and so the chieftainship will go to Alyard, head of the Council. His son Elwynn already plans to strengthen his claim to the title on Alyard's death. Those plans include tying the clan warriors together against a common object. Under his command, of course. I'm afraid you alone won't be enough."

"Cerlys," replied Taleera, softly, "there's something of the witch in you."

The old man grunted. "I keep my eyes and ears open, no more than that. Now, have you heard what I've said?"

She nodded. "I fail to kill their chief for them, and Tamre consoles itself with a blood-feud against my people. Is that the gist of it?"

"Perhaps, though, if Dwassalar dies soon it could be headed off. Tell me, Taleera, why did the Passing fail?"

"It didn't. I removed what barriers remained and called for Dwassalar to pass. His spirit refused."

"Refused? But I thought —"

"You thought that the ritual itself kills? No, Cerlys. If we could call a soul against its will those fools would have more right to fear us. We ease the passage; that's all. It *has* happened that a subject wasn't willing and there are . . . ways, to correct that."

Cerlys shivered slightly, but pressed on. "Those alternatives, would they serve here?"

She shook her head. "No, not if what you say is true."

Cerlys' hands balled into fists. "I have seen a man's will hold onto a spark of life long enough for the body to strengthen, but I know of nothing that saved a warrior whose head was struck off! It is so with Dwassalar; there is nothing to cling to, yet he will not die." He added, with emphasis, "There's something wrong."

"Ewen," said Taleera, almost to herself.

Cerlys looked thoughtful. "He calls to her. Perhaps she's the key," he ventured.

"Who is she? Can she be found?"

"She was Dwassalar's only daughter," replied Cerleys, "and finding her is no problem. Try the barrows."

Taleera clasped her hands behind her and began to move about the room in seemingly random patterns, her steps akin to a dance. She whispered to herself, and occasionally hummed bits and snatches of a tune Cerlys didn't recognize. He watched her with growing unease.

"Cerlys," she said at last, "are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Am I . . . ?"

"Afraid of ghosts," she repeated, very seriously. "I want to know."

"What are you thinking of?"

"I think you know. Stay or go, as it pleases you."

Cerlys got to his feet, but only to move away from the bed.

"I'll stay," he said.

Taleera fell silent again, her eyes going blank while she gazed at Dwassalar. Cerlys found himself listening to his heartbeat in the heavy stillness. Then Taleera spoke, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Chaos . . . Ah, there."

She shook herself like someone awakening, then flitted about the chamber snuffing tapers till only a single candle remained. She stopped at the foot of the bed and Cerlys got a glimpse of her face, pale and drawn in the candle-flicker

before it blurred and . . . changed. Cerlys' pulse quickened as he looked into the face of a pretty blonde girl ten years dead.

The apparition floated to Dwassalar's side. There was nothing at first, then a whisper that suddenly blossomed into a scream of rage. Dwassalar lashed out and the girl staggered back into Cerlys' arms. She was Taleera again, with an ugly welt on her cheek.

"Are you all right? What happened?" he demanded.

"I was a fool, that's what happened. Damn . . ." She touched her cheek gingerly. "A will that can keep life in a dead husk isn't likely to be fooled by illusion."

Cerlys examined her hurt and applied a pungent salve.

"You're going to have a bruise . . . Now what? Oh, hold still!"

"That stings . . . Oh, Ewen's the answer, all right. The seeming held for an instant, and his face . . . well, you should have seen it. He looked like a man pulled back from the brink of a chasm."

"Taleera," he sighed, "I know that if the sun was a bit closer this winter I wouldn't shiver so, yet what good does that knowledge do me?"

"If you had an idea of how to move the sun, it might do you a great deal of good."

Taleera took her deep blue traveling cloak from a peg and slipped it on.

"Where are you going?"

"To raise the dead."

Cerlys stared at the door long after it had closed behind her.

THE BROKEN SHELL tavern in the Conmyrean seaport of Amurlee was nearly deserted, which meant either war or, as now, a very late hour. Galshac al Chye sipped the last of his bitter wine alone at a small plank table. When it was finally gone he regarded the empty cup with an expression someone else might have reserved for a friend's betrayal. The worn spots on his under-tunic exposed his skin to the bare metal of his mailshirt, and Galshac winced as he eased his hulking frame into a more comfortable position. His strong, still-handsome face bore the scars of steel and too many lost battles.

It was late, and he thought that perhaps it was time to seek a companion to the night, but by now most of the women would have other, more profitable clients. Galshac knew that would be no problem; there were those that would not mind. Even so, he made no move to leave.

What Galshac wanted most was more wine.

Slowly, he became aware of the other patrons. Two well-dressed young bravos sat at a table near the alley wall, watching him through the dimness and candle-shadow with cold, appraising eyes. Galshac made an effort to slump lower in his chair, his head lolling drunkenly on his chest. The two gave no sign, but he knew that, if he left now, they would follow for a bit of sport.

Then he would have more wine.

He started to rise, but a singing female voice froze him to his seat.

"Only a fool plays the fish in a shark pen."

A young woman stood beside his table. She was wearing a blue cloak that covered her hair and reached to the floor. Her face was in shadow.

"It's no business of yours, woman!" he snarled, certain that his marks had overheard. There went the game.

Galshac watched while she removed her hood, freeing a mass of black hair to fall about her oval face. The candlelight revealed a streak of silver at her left temple, and the fading traces of a bruise on her cheek. She wasn't beautiful, and for some reason it didn't seem to matter. He thought that strange. Of course it

mattered; it always mattered.

She sat without being asked.

"Well, girl, you've freed the hare. Will the hound go hungry?" he asked, mockingly.

"Perhaps . . . that depends on you, Galshac." She watched him intently, like a chess player awaiting the next move.

The mercenary sat very still for a moment, then shrugged.

"So you know who I am. I thought I covered my trail better than that."

"For another man it might have been enough. You stand out like blood on a snowfield."

Galshac looked wary. "A skunk is easy to find, but still you have to look. That implies a reason. If you wish me to buy your silence I'll have to disappoint you."

The woman sighed. "Galshac, you're either a fool or take me for one. If I wanted to betray you to your clan it would have been enough to know where you are. Revealing myself would be a good way to get killed, since it's obvious that you're not wealthy. Think, Galshac, and you'll know I'm not after gold."

The warrior yawned. "Too bad, gold I could understand. Very well, I'll play riddles with you. I'll start by asking your name."

"I'm called Taleera."

"Witch." One word, short and brutal.

"Yes, witch," replied Taleera, "Like Sharea."

Galshac clenched his fists as if in anger, but his green eyes had the haunted, terrified look of a trapped animal.

"That's a lie," he said, his voice dangerously calm.

She smiled. "All witches are liars, they say. Listen, Galshac, and I'll spin you a tale like the harpers sing, only I'll not charge for my lies."

Galshac stared at the table without replying, and the witch waited only a moment before continuing.

"Once there were two brothers, sons of a clan chieftain. The elder was tall and fair, quick to smile and well loved. The younger was as different as flesh could be, dark, grim, and twisted by ambition. To the depths of his soul, he hated his brother. Thus matters stood until the elder met a woman, a beautiful woman with red-gold hair and a past she didn't speak of. As such things happen, they became lovers. She was a mystery, and that drew the younger brother like a moth. He went to her rooms while she kept a tryst with his brother and found her secret: his brother's darling was a witch. He called his father to witness, then he burst in on them and killed her. Now his brother was disgraced by having lain with a witch, and the title would go to him. His triumph was complete, except . . ." She looked at Galshac, who was smiling a bitter smile. "Shall I go on?"

"I hope," he said, "that you're a better witch than you are a storyteller. That's a tale made for the bards, full of deep passions and tragedy, and you sound like someone selling fish. Don't bother, I'll finish it for you: 'Except I killed him, yes, even as he stood there with a smile on his lips and her blood on his sword.' Didn't he look surprised . . . For all his scheming, Beron was a fool. No matter, I had to flee and here I am, selling my sword and getting drunk as often as humanly possible." He paused to stifle another yawn, then he regarded the witch through wine-reddened eyes. "You forgot to mention that he planted the 'evidence' he so conveniently found, or did you know that part of the story? Oh, well. We've told each other a nice story, and I've played your game. So. Will you please tell me what you want?"

"I want you to do a job for me, Galshac, and I'm willing to pay twenty weights

of gold for one night's work."

Galshac's eyes widened at the amount, but he quickly recovered. He forced a short laugh. "Who has to die?" He looked the witch up and down and said, "or is it more pleasant business? I'm already unfit for decent company."

Taleera met his frank gaze with equally frank distaste.

"Galshac, you over value yourself. Still, I've named the price. Do you want it or not?"

Galshac stared at his empty cup.

"What do I have to do?"

"I'm going to catch the Changer. You're the bait."

"The Changer is a myth."

"You're the bait," she replied, calmly. "Do you care if the trap comes up empty?"

"No, and mark this: it will. But why me? And what do you want with the Changer?"

Taleera smiled. "First," she said, "because I think you'll make a very strong lure. Second: My business isn't yours. Don't make it so."

Galshac laughed merrily, saying, "My reputation is intact at least. Very well, I am yours, Lady." There was a mocking emphasis on the last word.

THEY LEFT Amurlee at dawn, Taleera on a black and white mare, he on a chestnut gelding supplied by the witch. They rode in silence and slowly, since their destination lay only a day's ride to the west.

After an hour or so Taleera was the first to speak.

"What do you know of the Changer myth?"

The warrior grunted. "Winter hearth-tales that change a little themselves every season: A wizard in the valley Dimlys, jaded by wealth and power, conjured a spirit that could fulfill his every desire by becoming the woman he coveted most, whoever that happened to be at the moment. Soon afterward he went shrieking mad, blighting the entire valley before he managed to kill himself. That is the tale at clan Chye, and it's true as far as the valley goes. Nothing lives there now. Is the tale different in Amurlee?"

She shook her head. "No, not very. There are more specifics. The wizard's name was Alythrin, and he did go mad. The Changer was a rumor at the time and has become a legend."

"And you believe in legends."

"I do," she replied, angrily, "but I have sources other than rumor. How about you, Galshac? Do you believe in anything except wine?"

Galshac gave a despairing glance to the heavens, and when he spoke it was as if to himself. "My friend, you've sunk low indeed when a witch feels free to judge you. Well, I can live with that. I can live with anything, for that's my faith: survival. It is my strength. Next to wine, of course."

Little else was said until they reached the valley that evening. Dimlys, 'Place of Shadows', wasn't always its name, though it fit now. What trees there were grew short and gnarled, looking like bent dwarves in the fading light. The grass and soil had a dull grayish cast that centuries of rain hadn't washed away, and even the stars seemed wan and pale in the somber sky. Except for the ring of an iron-shod hoof and the jingling of harnesses there wasn't so much as the buzz of an insect to break the silence.

"The place isn't much farther," whispered Taleera, as if there was someone else who might hear.

They stopped at a group of ruined towers that looked like shattered teeth in

the blighted valley jaw. Taleera took a brown bundle from her saddle and unpacked several dyed linens, plus a small carved box of blackened oak. The lines were round, and carried a design in brown thread on a green field. Galshac thought the pattern resembled a circle of hemp, but didn't bother to make sure.

Taleera pressed her right index finger to her lips and looked thoughtfully about until she spotted a fallen granite keystone. She bade him sit there. Feeling foolish, he obeyed while she placed the linens in a ten-foot square about the stone, the corners set to the four points of the compass. When she was done Taleera gathered her cloak about her and sat on the grass outside the trap.

"Now what?" he asked, thinking he should do something.

"Sit there and be male," she replied, sweetly.

He sat. One hour. Two. The night deepened until the witch was only a lighter patch of darkness to his left. Galshac shifted uncomfortably when his already weary bottom began to burn from sitting and still nothing happened.

Driven by boredom, Galshac looked to the stars. One by one he marked the constellations he had learned as a boy, taught by his father during the endless summers. He felt a strange satisfaction when he realized that he hadn't forgotten. It didn't last. Soon other, darker memories came unbidden, along with the anger and guilt that went with them.

Feelings that Galshac had thought long dead.

As a child, he had never believed in ghosts. He did now, with the fragments of his life seeping through his mind like the specters they were. Real ghosts, not the spirits of wronged men and women come seeking revenge. No phantom could haunt him half so well as he did himself.

Still, time had worked its magic, and soon the memories faded into the backdrop of stars. All but one. Her image intensified: shining red-gold hair, and those eyes . . . beautiful, pained, accusing. He smiled bitterly, thinking that a ghost was better than nothing. Galshac had learned to take what he could get, and if the memory was not gentle . . . well, that was a small enough price. It was nothing to what Sharea had paid, as he would know as long as Sharea was there to remind him, to haunt him with an unreadable message in her damned, wonderful eyes. Terrible eyes . . .

Galshac shook himself roughly and started to look away, but something caught his attention. There were two stars on the horizon that he hadn't noticed before, and while he watched they grew brighter. Not 'brighter,' he told himself firmly — *closer*. Rapidly they left the sky, rushing toward him and changing from star-yellow to cold blue as they came. Galshac stared, fascinated. They were very close, now, almost to the square. They looked like luminous eyes in an invisible face.

He realized dully that they *were* eyes. Mists started to coalesce around them into the semblance of a female form, and the eyes watched him with a terrible sadness that made him afraid, it was so tangible. It was like eons of frustration and pain given shape and dimension. The shape was familiar . . .

"Galshac, look away!"

The warrior forced his eyes shut, but a need too strong to fight made him open them again, open them to welcome the horror.

It was gone. Taleera stood before him within the trap, the box in her hands. She watched him closely.

"You have it?" The witch nodded, keeping her eyes on him. "Good," he said, and his voice took a menacing edge. "Give it to me." Galshac drew his notched blade and held out his hand.

"No." There was a hardness in her voice, but no surprise.

"Witch, don't try me. I've no great wish to kill you. In fact, I'm grateful. If the legend is true as you say this thing is worth a lot more than twenty weights of gold. Any lecherous princeling would dwarf your price, and then I'll buy a ship and be free from Chye for good!"

There was pity in the witch's eyes.

"I never said the legend was true."

Galshac took a firmer grip on his sword.

"I saw the thing. It exists!"

"What I said was that I believed in the Changer legend. Legend contains only a kernel of truth at best."

The warrior's face lost some of its assurance.

"What do you mean?"

The witch's sigh stirred the dead air like a night breeze.

"Galshac, time is short but you *will* understand this because you must! Listen: It's true that Alythrin went mad. Why would having the bedmate of his choice cause that?"

"Don't try to confuse me, Taleera. Perhaps it had nothing to do with the Changer!"

"It had everything to do with the Changer, you fool! You had a glimpse, you must have seen . . . Alythrin failed! The legend is correct in what he attempted, but what actually appeared was a spirit that became the woman whose image was strongest in his mind! Do you think for an instant that they were one and the same?" Her eyes were dark fires, burning him.

"I don't believe you!"

"No?"

Galshac watched in sudden, growing horror as Taleera ever so slightly lifted the lid. The interior of the box glowed pale blue.

Galshac licked his now dry lips and said, almost pleadingly, "It . . . it was a joke! Keep your precious demon; I won't try to take it."

"That's all right, Galshac," she said. "I'm willing to share."

"Damn you, Taleera, you don't understand! I — It was my fault. Sharea's death. Beron screamed at her, called her a witch. I was surprised, and I . . . hesitated. He killed her while I stood there like a fool!"

"It's you who doesn't understand, Galshac. Did you think that Sharea didn't know you suspected, or what a dangerous game she played? Beron didn't plant any evidence, nor were you surprised. Sharea died because you just couldn't decide."

Taleera opened the box a little wider.

Galshac's sword dropped to the ground, unnoticed.

"I don't think I want you to do that," he said, softly.

"I think not," she agreed. "Yet we have no choice, you and I."

"I didn't want her to die. I didn't . . ." Galshac drifted for a time, tracing the path of lost years until it led back to Dimlys.

"Too late again, aren't you, fool?" he murmured, finally. "Sharea won, there at the last. Damn it, I knew she was a witch. I was going to tell her that it didn't matter. You know, I never got to . . ."

Taleera reached out and gently shook him.

"Tell her," she said, as a woman's voice called him from far away.

"Galshac . . . ?"

The mists gathered.

THEY ARRIVED at the Great House on the evening of the eighth day. Cerlys

was puzzled by the witch's strangely silent companion, but Taleera forbade all questions. He obeyed reluctantly when she asked him to leave.

Dwassalar suddenly quieted when she gently placed the box at his bedside, and the harsh lines in his face relaxed a little. Taleera kneeled by the old man's head for a moment, and Galshac was certain that her lips moved, forming words he wasn't meant to hear. She soon rose, as if this was best done quickly, and led him outside. Before they passed the threshold, he saw the box open of its own accord.

The orange sun was low in the sky, and from the surrounding tents drifted the clatter and babble of the evening meal. The horses grazed nearby.

"Taleera, you're a witch and a mistress of illusion, if any rumor is to be trusted. Couldn't you play the part of the Changer?"

"He wouldn't accept the illusion, and I could not be Ewen as the Changer can." She smiled at him and said, "Trade secret, but I guess I owe you that, as well as this."

She held out a heavy-looking leather pouch, but he made no move to take it.

"It's all there. Count it."

Galshac smiled ruefully and slowly shook his head. "It's both too much and too little. I will keep the horse, if you agree. I've a long way to go yet."

"Will you tell me where?"

Galshac mounted, saying, "To Chye, of course."

Taleera said nothing, but her black eyes searched his face as if looking for something long hidden.

"The Changer . . . You will free her — it, I mean, when this is done?"

"Her," she corrected, gently. "Yes, we have an agreement, too. Not how you mean, though. She is weary of this place."

"Then I am paid."

"Galshac, you do understand, don't you? There's still a price on your head; this changes nothing. Do you expect things to be different?"

Galshac felt her uncertainty and it made him smile. It was the first time she had seemed less than totally sure of anything.

He drew in his reins and said, "No, I don't understand. Never did. That price you mentioned — did you know that it's only payable if I'm returned alive? Somehow I think Father will listen before he'll do what he's sworn to do. As for the rest . . . I don't know. That's different, isn't it?"

He spurred his mount east, hoping that he was finally running in the right direction. The young sorceress watched him dwindle.

"Yes, Witch," she said aloud, "I am. But I can't boast the power you fools give so freely. I wonder if you know?"

Taleera stood in silence for a long time, thinking of binding spells without magic and self-made prisons.

A whisper at the edge of her awareness grew until the message was clear. Soon the fields rang with the news: The chief is dead! The Chief is dead!

Taleera laughed. ●

Rick Parks

I'm a chemist by trade, specializing in paint and polymer films. Lately most of my work has been with computers, so between the keyboard and the typewriter I

think I've etched 'qwertyuiop' into my retina.

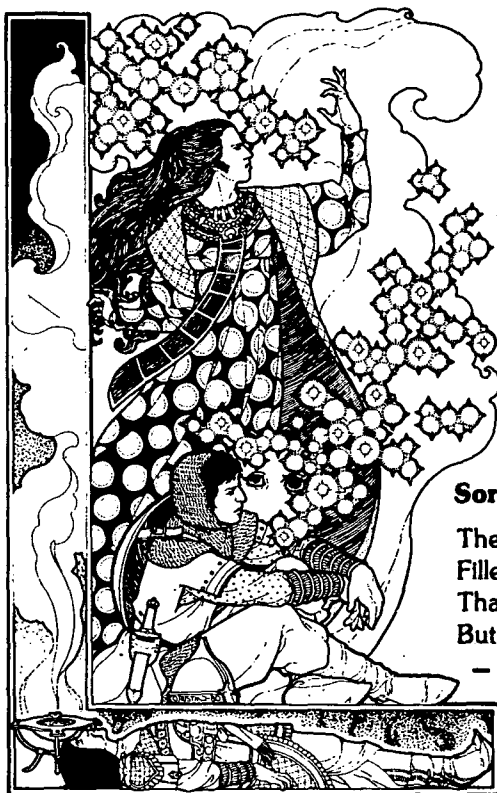
FANTASTIC slipped up on me in '76, and I started to write seriously about the

same time. Since then I've collected 35 rejections (for the statistically minded), and feel lucky to have gotten off so lightly before my first professional sale. No, Powers-That-Be, that was not a hint.

Taleera is very special to me. She's so convinced of her reality that I'm convinced, too. It makes things much easier.

Currently I'm about 3/4ths through a novel of which "The Passing" is a digression.

I'm married to a beautiful poet named Carol who is the joy of my life (and a helluva critic). I'm owned by a cat named Early who sometimes helps me type.



Sorcery

The universe is
Filled with magic
That is unexplained
But still in tune.

— Joey Froelich

The Butter Lady came again today, but then she's come every day since I got here. She walked down the winding path through the tall shade trees to my hut with the two big buckets dangling from the yoke around her neck, balancing on those little bare feet, her steps precise in the loose fall leaves that covered the ground like a cinnamon carpet. I call her the Butter Lady, but actually she brings many good things to eat. Yesterday she brought thick warm milk. Was it cheese the day before? It's difficult to remember each day but I try hard 'cause I know that if I forget too much I'll never get it back.

I can see a slice of the valley through the hut entrance and it's nice here. Lots of big trees and some big patches of grass that blend into the low hills where the sun comes up. I guess it's the same behind my hut but I've never seen that side. I hear the birds in the daytime and the insects at night when it's really dark.

Funny thing is; I've never heard a cow. 'Course I was sick for a long time and I sleep quite a bit and maybe I missed them. I tell myself that's sensible — but how can you miss a cow?

The butter was good today, sweet and fresh and delicious and I didn't gag this time. She offered it with the silver dipper that hangs around her neck by a piece of old cord, standing far enough back so I can't try to bite her again. I didn't mean no harm, I just got mad because she never talks to me. Maybe she's a mute? All I wanted to know was my name. I can't remember my name and that's not fair she shouldn't tell me.

I leaned down and sniffed at the dipper full of the yellow gold and trying hard not to move my lips, I said, "Parkay."

I was feeling pretty high, like I had been doing grass but damn!, I got to admit, I thought I had her that time. But she didn't bat an eye, just sort of offered that easy smile of hers and went on feeding me as if she hadn't heard a word. With some of the remarks I've hit her with you'd think I'd've at least gotten a raised eyebrow or a frown. Maybe she's deaf too, 'cause she always remains aloof, even the time I told her she had big tits. You ain't gonna get me to believe she don't know what tits are, uh huh! Even in the backwater ridge country of Pennsylvania they know what those are.

Now how did I know this was Pennsylvania? I remember driving through the rolling hills on . . . on . . . damn! It gets so hazy. . . . Anyway, sometimes I make a face at her, thumbs stuck in my cheeks and my eyes rolled all the way back with my tongue sticking out and touching the tip of my nose. That still hurts like hell, so I don't do it much. My face was a real mess when I got here. I remember the loose skin falling over my eyes and the blood, God, all the blood. I must have passed out in the woods after I crawled out of the Datsun because I just remember snatches of being carried under the trees for a long time and then being plunked down on the pallet of straw where I spend all my time now, naked and alone. Except when the Butter Lady comes.

I know when she's coming because I can hear the creaking of the buckets on the yoke when she starts down the hill toward my hut and sometimes when I'm feeling real good I jump up and kinda hop to the door. I could probably ask her to

the BUTTER LADY

RON MONTANA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get me a staff or something to lean on but I guess I just don't want to admit I only have one leg.

So I make like I'm still convalescing and someday soon, I tell her, I'll be up and about with the best of them. I get the same noncommittal look I got when I brought up tit size, so who knows?

Anyway, I'd probably have a hard time walking with two good legs the way I've put on weight since I got here. I keep telling her, "Butter Lady, I'm going to be a fat person if you don't stop feeding me all this rich food." I got back a funny smile that time. A word or two would have been nice, but I settled for the smile!

Strange thing about the leg, though. . . I remember going into the turn at the top of the pass a taste too fast — but who in the hell would put a barricade in the middle of the road on an uphill turn without any warning? . . . Well, I lost it, and that's no lie. I remember like it was slow motion, the car rolling over down the embankment and my face slamming into the side window. I musta been thrown out 'cause I was laying' next to the car when it burst into flames and I remember screaming and jumping up and running away with my jacket on fire. Musta been a nightmare. How could I run with only one leg?

I feel really great today. She brought thick creamy porridge and gobs of cottage cheese. I ate till I couldn't take another bite, then I went to sleep again. I remember when I was a baby my mother used to call me a little piggy 'cause I fell asleep right after eating all the time. I don't know why, but I woke up in the middle of the night. I think maybe I heard a scream. I was real dizzy but I managed to stumble to the hut door and look outside. A slivered moon was just peeking out from behind a bank of low clouds and I could barely make out the outline of the next nearest hut. There was a lamp burning and I could see some kind of activity inside, then the light went out and two dark figures left the hut carrying something bundled between them. I thought I could hear a low whimpering from inside the hut.

Today I got sick for the first time. The Butter Lady brought me a dish of thick gruel, something that looked like oatmeal but tasted very sweet, and she sat beside me and watched me eat it, making sure I didn't waste a drop. Then she smiled, patted me on the head and left. I crawled over to the bucket in the far corner to urinate and I guess I musta ate too fast because I threw up all over the ground.

After a while I felt better and I dozed. When I woke up my head was much clearer and I remembered my name was Michael.

The next day, after the Butter Lady took away the bowl I crawled over to the bucket and stuck my finger down my throat. I filled the bucket with vomit, then stirred in some straw so it wouldn't be noticed. Now I was never a whiz kid but it seemed I had been out of it for a long time. What the hell was I doing living in a hut out in the country somewhere? I had a job in Trenton and I had to get back.

For the first time the stark realization of my missing leg hit me and I cried for hours. When the sun went down the Butter Lady came in carrying a dish. There was somebody with her.

He was a big man in overalls with a long black beard and fierce eyes and he didn't say anything, just kinda looked me over carefully and grunted. I got really scared because he was looking at me like I was a prize boar, impersonal but with an air of competence that was terrifying. The Butter Lady hung back out of his way while he made his inspection, pushing on my muscles and running his hands

over my naked sides. I played it like I was drowsy, moved into the fetal position and moaned softly, letting a line of saliva drool from the corner of my mouth. The man studied my face, then began to reach toward my eye with a thumb and forefinger and it all of a sudden hit me that he was going to skin back my eyelid to see just how drugged I was.

I exerted pressure on my bowels and relieved myself noisily all over his boots. The mess and smell was overwhelming and the dark man moved back and shook his head at the Butter Lady. She nodded and the man left. Kneeling beside me, she placed the plate by my head and ran a cool hand over my brow. I purred like a kitten and tried to snuggle up to her but she rose and left before I could poise for an attack.

I dumped the food from my plate into my excrement and covered the whole mess with straw, leaving the glistening plate in the center of the floor. Then I waited. It couldn't have been more than an hour when I heard her footsteps again. I snored loudly as she entered and took the plate. When she was gone I waited by counting to sixty one hundred times. Then I got up and hopped to the door.

Outside was bad. The big, big trees made long narrow shadows over the piles of black leaves because the moon was way over in one end of the sky. And it was cold. Not just the chilly feeling that had begun to creep into the nights but a real stark cold. I got down on my hands and knee and fumbled in the bushes at the base of the nearest elm. There were some short pieces of broken limb and a fairly long branch that I could use for a staff. I found another piece about four inches long and very sharp on one side, like a knife, and that I carried in one hand as I hobbled through the clearing.

It was quiet, as if the entire earth were sleeping, even the night insects were conspicuous in their absence. I was getting a little dizzy but I made it to the next hut and, panting, leaned heavily against its worn wooden side. From here I could see the entire clearing, really more a small valley where maybe a half dozen similar huts and a big white barn stood, then a long low fence and beyond that a pasture that reached to the base of the hollow.

I caught my breath and moved to the doorway of the hut. The moonlight shafted through the opening and illuminated a body on its back snoring loudly on a straw pallet in the center of the floor. It was a woman of indeterminate age, grossly fat, her swollen belly so badly distended she resembled a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy. Her ponderous breasts reached almost all the way down her stomach and they moved like obscene slugs with each breath she took. There was a slight grin on her puffy lips and her hair was a ball of dirty string and the insides of her thighs were caked with filth. The tree limbs moved in a slight breeze and the shadows they cast in the hut played strange tricks with my vision. I moved closer to get a better look at her.

She had no arms or legs.

I covered my mouth with my hand to stifle the scream that welled up in my throat and hopped back to my hut as fast as I could. I fell into a corner, the staff drawn up in front of me to protect me. My name is Michael Francher and I'm a drapery salesman from Trenton. I have a wife and a little girl and I want to go home.

I cried myself to sleep.

I musta slept for a long time 'cause when I woke up my left arm was gone. My shoulder was bound with a clean white bandage and it didn't hurt at all. I felt my

face with my remaining hand and my beard was much longer. I felt good, full, comfortable. Then the nightmare I had while I slept came back into my mind — the woman in the hut — no, it was just a bad dream. I'm safe and warm and everything is fine.

The Butter Lady came in with a bowl of milk and shook her head at me like I'd been a bad boy. I kinda hid my face and sulked, not really knowing why. If it was a dream, why did I feel guilty?

She lifted me to a sitting position and supported me with her arm as she held the bowl to my lips. I drank the cool creamy liquid slowly, savoring the warmth of her bare arm against my back, the skin hunger abating with the security of her embrace. I wanted to nuzzle her breasts and nurse, and I think she could feel my infantile reactions as I crooned into her arms. It had all been a bad dream, I was safe now, nothing could happen to me here.

I put my hand beneath me to brace myself higher as the bowl emptied and my hand touched something smooth and sharp under the loose straw. It was a four inch length of wood, knifelike and familiar. I froze, the fear in my stomach like a ball of pure fire. I began to tremble and the milk I had in my mouth dribbled all over my chest. The Butter Lady rocked me back and forth as she held the bowl to my lips again. My fingers tightened around the piece of wood and I took a big gulp of milk, then leaned my head back and spit it right in her eyes. She dropped the bowl and raised her hands to her face. I lunged in under her arms and fastened my teeth on her adam's apple, biting as hard as I could. She jerked mightily and almost pulled away, but I had the wooden spike up in an arc that buried it three inches into her chest just below the sternum. I tasted the sweet warm blood spurtling all over my face and I could hear the dying gurgle of a scream choking off in her throat as she went limp in my arm.

Then her body jerked twice, the spasms almost throwing me to the floor. She was finally still and I pushed her away as I crawled to the wall of the hut beside the doorway with the piece of wood clutched firmly between my teeth.

I balanced on my foot and pulled myself to a standing position in the shadows, wedging my bulk back out of sight in the corner. I leaned against the wall and took the spike from my mouth with my sweat stained fingers.

I repeated my name over and over again as I waited for somebody to come looking for the butter lady.

Ever have secret dreams? Fantasies that descend upon you in the middle of the day when you should be concentrating on the real world? I am, primarily a film writer, or would like to think so. But on some days when I'm involved in story conferences with producers or sales pitching a network exec or scrunched over a shooting script (that's one with a lot of gunfire in it) I sometimes find my mind sinking to convoluted depths even I hadn't anticipated.

The "Butter Lady" is the result of one of those cerebral meanderings on a day when I was confronted by an impossible deadline. So, tearing myself gratefully away from "The Invasion of the Bodice Snatchers" or some such mundane erotica, I took the time to indulge my twisted libido. You have just read the result of that meditative detour. Now I can get back to work on "Butch Cassidy meets Godzilla."

— Ron Montana

"I am mad north by north-west, and in any other direction things are not much better."

— *The Collected Works of Anonymous*

There were lunatics aplenty on the roads in those days; it was a splendid time to be mad. All too many filled the halls of Bethlehem Mercy Hospital, better known as Bedlam ("God help all ye who enter here!"), and so it was that some of those whose condition was unquestionable, who could not be taken for mere rogues or frauds, were sent out into the world to beg. It was cheaper. It looked good in the account books. It provided endless amusement to passersby.

Thus, a curious person named Tom — between eight and eighty, taller than a cricket and shorter than an oak — who had never been even suspected of sanity, and an equally certain Nicholas, formerly a gaoler of the place but now fallen on difficult times, set forth to win their bacon. They wandered among the other distracted, fantastical fellows, blowing horns, ringing little bells, making strange faces at people, and singing stranger songs.

One day they met an old man dressed all in black:

"A coin, sirrah? A trivial, tiny, tsk-tsk penny of a coin?"

"Oh no, said he, trembling as he leaned on his cane. "I can give you nothing, for I am suffering from the ague, and must pay all I have to a doctor of physick to get rid of my ills."

"But we can drive them away with a few verses," said Tom, and he nudged his companion. The two of them leaned on their crooked staves, swayed from side to side in time, and sang:

*"From the hag and the hungry goblin
That into rags would rend ye,
All spirits stand
By the naked man
In the book of moons defend ye!"*

And the old man laughed, gave each of them a small coin, and went on his way. It is not recorded if he was cured or not.

And they came upon a miser, counting up his money. He was in the back of a wagon doing it, hugging his bags of gold, surrounded by ruffians hired to guard him.

Copyright ©1981 by Darrell Schweitzer

raving lunacy **DARRELL SCHWEITZER**

Sanity will get you nowhere . . .

100 AMAZING/FANTASTIC

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Illustrated by Alicia Austin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A coin? A coin for two poor souls bereft of wit and will?"

"Go to, go to," said the ruffians, "and go away, before we knock your teeth down yer throat an' out yer arse."

And the two madmen sang:

"Grim king of ghosts make haste,
And bring hither all your train;
See how the pale moon does waste,
And just now is in the wane.
Come you night-hags, with all your charms,
And revelling witches away,
Hug me close in your arms;
To you my respects I'll pay."

Hearing this, the miser was run through with dread, for he knew that the waning moon of the song was his own fortune and perhaps his life, and the night-hags, well — overall those words could bring down upon one anything from whirlwinds to breaking wind, to boils, to elf-shot, to sour milk, to a kick in the butt and a visit from (not so, in this respect, in fact a greedy old bugger) Good King Harry's tax collectors. He barked a command, and the wagon was off in a clatter.

On that same day, a few hours later, Tom and his friend sat by the roadside, lazily dangling bells from their fingers, when they had a third encounter.

There came the tread of many feet, the jangling of metal on metal.

The two sprang up, mumbling lines from idiotic old songs, but before they could launch fully into their routine, they found themselves face-to-face with a sheriff and half a dozen men at arms with pikes and steel helmets. The sheriff looked o'er his left shoulder, and a grim look looked he, and then he turned around because it was more comfortable, and glared. The men-at-arms were scarcely more cheerful. Only one had to repress a snicker.

And the sheriff handed a paper to Nick, who twitched his head sideways and said, "Alas, a poor demented soul like me can't read."

So the sheriff snatched it back, let out a *harumph*, cleared his throat, and read (in pompous bold letter, if it is possible to vocalize a typeface):

"Be it known that *Nicholas Block*, formerly keeper of the Bethlehem Hospital For The Moonstruck, Hag-ridden, Melt-a'-Brained, and Generally Addled, shall be charged with the foul offense of *counterfeiting*, for which he may be hanged, on account of the affair of two unlikely pennies, as has been previously related in a doubtful history yclept, to-wit, and without further ado, "*Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out*," and unless that same *Nicholas Block* can, within thirty days of this notice, prove himself to be truly beyond his wit's end, that is to say 'mad' and not just pretending, all rights shall be forfeited, all contracts void, licenses revoked, and off with his head, if the hangman doesn't get there first. Signed, Lord High Judge To His Majesty's Court, Honorius Muckamuck, Etcetera, Etcetera, Gesundheit, Amen. Anno MDXXXIX. *God Save The King!*"

"From what may we save him, pray tell?" asked Nicholas Block, as if he hadn't understood any of the foregoing.

"You surely know," said the sheriff, "that it's wicked to pretend. Why, all the false madmen in this country ought to be locked up, and will be, at the very least!"

"For the public good," said Tom, solemnly.

"For that very reason. So, *Nicholas Block*, show yourself out of your head within the month, or else."

"You could go mad with the effort," said the man-at-arms who had had to repress the snicker. He could no longer, and threw a coin to Tom, who caught it, put it between his teeth, bit off a piece, and swallowed.

"Hmm, good," he said, and swallowed the rest.

Now there was a whole chorus of snickers, and the sheriff was too busy snarling at his men to notice until too late that Nick had snatched the pronouncement out of his hand, torn it into strips, thrown his head back, and was in the process of swallowing them one by one.

Everyone was laughing except the sheriff, whose face was as fierce as a heathen idol. Some people have no sense of humor.

AS DUSK CAME upon them that same day, Tom and Nick came upon a carriage stopped in the middle of the road. Three men were grunting and straining as they strove to replace a broken wheel. A distance away from them two ladies stood, fluttering fans in front of their faces even though the air was getting cool. They both started as the two ragged figures approached.

Tom blew a blast on his horn, evicting a mouse which had been dwelling in it, and sang:

*"The spirits white as lightning,
Would on me travels guile me.
The moon would shake
And the stars would quake,
Whenever they espied me."*

"How terrible! Brave fellow!" the ladies laughed.
Not to be outdone, Nick broke in:

*"I slept not till the Conquest;
Till then I never waked;
Till the roguish boy
Of love where I lay,
Found me and stript me naked."*

At this one lady rolled her eyes to heaven in feigned dismay and said, "Well, that's certainly odd!"

But the other applauded. "Poor, poor wretch," said she, and, seeing that Nick was barefoot, she took a pair of bell-tipped slippers out of her luggage and gave them to him.

"I thank ye, ma'am, from the bottom of my empty skull, which is bottomless, 'tis said."

He put the slippers on his hands, stood on them, and ran along the highway, over a hill and out of sight, his toes waving in the air.

"I think you've got it," said Tom when he caught up with him, and they both lay in the grass, gasping for breath. "That was the craziest thing I've ever seen."

"Then why doesn't the judge believe me? Aren't I as mad as can be?"

"His Honor doesn't think so."

"But I've raved. I've ranted."

"So have lawyers."

"I've seen rare and terrible visions."

"John the apostle saw so many he filled a book with them and called it *Revela-*

tions. Now would ye be so blasphemous a knave as to call him mad?"

"Well . . . no — but I'm no bloody saint neither! Tom, you've helped me before, even when I didn't deserve it. What am I to do?"

"Do is just it. Don't think, do. We lunatics follow our fancies. It's a way of looking at the world, madness is, and the world looking back at you, and running shrieking from what it sees. An unphilosophical — er, untrilolropical — an unphilosophical philosophy. And if you can't mouth gibberish like this, you haven't a chance. . . ."

The two of them sat still as the evening darkened, and the shadows flowed like the tide from behind the houses and out of the forests and covered the land. The sky was a deep blue, the sun an orange trace in the west. The first stars appeared. Night hawks flew. Cowbells rang far away as the herds were driven home.

At last Tom rose and said, "Stay here a while, I won't be gone long."

"Where are you going?"

"To find the answer, of course. Everything is written in the book of moons. You just have to know how to read it."

He walked alone across the darkened fields until he came to an old pagan place, ringed with upturned stones. He climbed atop a horizontal piece, which lay across two vertical ones, and looked to the east.

At first the moon was only a glimmer between the trees on a distant hill, then a brightness like a signal fire, and then it was slowly gliding into the sky, full in all its glory and roundness, and the Man In The Moon, his thorn branch, staff, and dog hidden in the brilliant glare of his lantern, looked down on the world.

He winked.

In response, Tom howled. He called out to the moon itself, not the man, in a language which has no words and is lost to ordinary folk. He addressed it as mother, lover, and goddess of the night, and he asked of it a favor, that a way might be found out of his friend's difficulties. The answer came as the spirit of the moon filled him and it seemed that all the world was filled with soft light, and he was floating on it like water. He was quiet. The world was quiet. There were none of the usual night sounds. He leaned back, as if asleep in the peace of the moon.

And fell off the stone.

The darkness was a riot of chirps and rustlings.

The Man In The Moon winked again.

WHEN HE RETURNED to where he had left him, Tom found Nick on all fours, staring intently at a clump of reeds.

"Tom! Hush! Be careful! I've had a vision and you might step on it!"

"Don't be afraid. I won't squash it."

"You don't understand. It was a little man, a hand high — look!"

"There's a lot of that going around."

But even as he spoke, Tom looked, and he saw something moving out of the reeds.

It was a box, revealed by the moonlight to be intricately carved. At first it seemed to be moving of its own accord, but then he saw that it was carried by a little man only half as large as it was. The fellow was plainly exhausted. At any moment he might drop dead, crushed by his burden.

"Please sirs," came a diminutive voice. "Can I put it down?"

Nick looked to his friend quizzically.

"First tell us," said Tom, "why you have to ask permission."

"It's part of the curse. Five thousand years ago the wizard said I couldn't put it

down without being told to, but if someone else were to take the box, he could do whatever he liked —”

But Nick broke in, “For mercy’s sake, let him rest.” And to the elf: “Yes, put it down. Then explain.”

The man seemed to evaporate, and the box fell to the ground. He was not to be seen. The companions leaned forward, wondering if he’d been mashed, and jumped back again as a black snake whipped out from under and pressed the latch with its snout.

The lid flipped open, and a thing emerged to confound the eye. A puff of smoke hovered over the spot. In a flicker there followed an explosion of something off-white, like dirty milk, followed by a shapeless mass of flesh wriggling free, a glob far larger than the box. Finally an old woman stood there, leaning on a cane. She was archetypically hideous with a long, warty nose that almost touched her chin, a trace of whiskers around her mouth, a wide assortment of blemishes and boils on her face and bags under the eyes, and an evil grin which exposed green, irregularly spaced teeth. For the barest instant she could hardly stand astride the box, but then she grew like a skin being inflated until her glittering eyes were on the same level as those of Tom and Nick, who were crouched down on their haunches. That would make her about three feet tall.

The serpent coiled up one leg. She took it in hand and held it to her breast, where it vanished into her clothing.

Tittering, she hobbled over the open plain, still leaning on her stick, yet going at such a pace she could have outraced a stallion.

“Oh, God,” said Nick, “*what* have we let loose?”

“I think we’ll find out,” said Tom.

DEJECTED, AFRAID, they wandered in search of a place to spend the night. Nick took the empty box with him in hope that someone could tell them something about it.

At length they came to a hollow log large enough to accommodate the both of them, and they crawled inside, falling at once into a troubled sleep.

In the middle of the night Tom sat up suddenly and looked outside. What he saw made his heart skip a beat with terror. Nick was out there, chained and bound, surrounded by the sheriff and his men. Their helmets and blades gleamed in the moonlight.

They had forced Nick to kneel down, and one of them held him by the hair and pulled his head forward until it was all he could do to maintain his balance.

A gigantic executioner, bare-chested and hooded in black, hefted an enormous axe over the exposed neck.

Tom noticed that all of them took special care not to turn their backs to Nick. The reason for this was obvious: all of them were hollow behind. They had only three sides to their bodies and were open on the fourth. They stood and moved like sails filled with wind.

The axe rose and was about to fall.

“Stop!” He scrambled out of the log and charged. One hand passed into the executioner’s open back and out through his front, which felt like a mass of dusty spiderwebs. There was a pop, and all the apparitions vanished save for the executioner who, now two-dimensional like a sheet of paper caught in the wind, whirled and tumbled over the fields. Scarcely comprehending the impulse, Tom chased after him.

“Wait! Come back here! Explain all this!”

But the executioner blew on, until at last he caught around something standing upright and flapped, like a flag tangled around its pole.

Tom crashed into whatever it was and found it as unyielding as stone.

The 'flag' wrapped itself over his face. He felt and smelled the heat and sweat of the executioner's body for a minute or two, but then hands other than his own were tearing the thing away.

He found himself in the arms of the green-toothed crone. She tittered again, then spoke very clearly the words "Grandmother Grey," and let go of him. She hobbled jerkily away as she had before, impossibly fast.

As he was watching her vanish in the distance, something struck Tom on the head. The world blinked out and back into existence, and he found himself inside the log. He had hit his head sitting up, and before that he had been dreaming.

At the same moment Nick was coming in the other end of the log.

"Tom," said he, "I know I'm mad, of course, but still it was the strangest thing. I dreamed that I was standing at a crossroads, where a highwayman was hanging from a gibbet. He was slowly turning in the cold wind, muttering to himself. Then I woke up because it was so cold, and I was really there, barefoot in the snow beneath a body rotating in the wind."

"Snow?"

There was no need to answer. Outside, even though it was the middle of July, snow drifted down out of a steely sky.

"It's Grandmother Grey," said Tom, his breath coming in white puffs. "She did all this."

"That's what the hanged man said."

THE DAY DID not really dawn. The sky faded somewhat into a murky twilight. Height and distance were lost in the swirling flakes. Already the landscape was covered with a rolling white blanket, the rough surface of twigs, leaves, grass, and stones smoothed over and buried.

The two companions huddled in their log, tearing strips from their doublets (as neither had a cloak) to tie around their feet. The slippers the lady had given Nick the previous evening proved useful after all.

The world was otherwise empty. There were no travellers on the road. Doubtless everyone had either found shelter or perished in the night.

"I think . . ." Nick said, his words interrupted with grunts as he struggled with a knot which would not stay knotted, "that we . . . will have to put an end to what we've begun . . ."

"Beard the beast in its lair," said Tom.

"Does Grandmother Grey have a beard?"

"If you look closely, yes, she does."

"Who is she, anyway?"

"No sane mind could believe it, but she is the Mother of Darkness nevertheless. She hates all things warm and alive. She hates color, and bleaches it out of everything she touches. She can only stand pure white — snow — and the grey of twilight, the black of the inside of a tomb. And I think she will tolerate blue, if it's a corpse. You know:

*"From Grandmother Grey till the break of day,
I'll flee until I'm frozen.
Till the sky turns black
And me bones all crack,
And I'm in the grave she's chosen."*

"But where did she come from?"

"Where?" quoth Tom. "The story goes that an old god wanted to create the human race, so he drank a potion, planning to spit us all out, but he belched, and there she was. One look at her and he gave up, which is why you and I are sons of Adam and Eve, not someone else."

The two of them rose, wrapped their rags as tightly around themselves as they could, took staves in hand, and set out, faces into the wind. Tom shivered and looked down on a dead crow, and several still blooming flowers bending with the wind. He wished he could have the executioner of his dream with him now, flapping as a cloak. Anything. It was so cold.

The bells on Nick's slippers tinkled mournfully.

A MOUNTAIN rose in the middle of the plain, at the very spot where the box had been opened. When the snow was no more than a sprinkle, and even before that, when farmers merely shrugged at the unseasonable chill and hoped it would be warm again by morning, the thing was there. It condensed out of the air faster than the snow could fall, but the flakes added to it, as if a hundred fell there for each one somewhere else. The heap on the ground grew into a drift, then into a cold mound, like something a heathen king of winter would be buried under, and it continued to rise until cliffs of pale ice towered over the countryside. Fields and forests were swallowed up by the expanding base. People fled from it in long lines along the roads, sunk in up to their knees, leading their cattle and carrying what goods could be borne away.

There was a preacher who stood in a tree exhorting the people to fall down then and there and repent, for surely God's judgement was on the land for their wickedness. He was ignored. The wind drove the refugees on, until the holy man was alone.

He was astonished to see Tom and Nick coming from the direction in which the others had gone.

"Stop! You can't go toward the mountain! You must be out of your minds!"

"Yea verily, verily, I say unto you verily, verily you're right the first time," said Tom.

"Verily," said Nick between chattering teeth.

"The Devil!" said the holy man.

"No, it's too cold for him. Grandmother Grey."

THE MOUNTAIN rose black against the sky out of which the snow whirled. The wind blew and blew. The peaks creaked and rumbled as they drove higher into the murk. It was the hour before noon.

As Tom and Nick began to climb, they felt they were on a treadmill, because the distance would increase for every step they took. But then they got ahead of it, and were carried aloft on the still growing mountain.

The snow was so thick around them they were blinded in a white void. At times they could see a few drifts and blocks of ice, at other times nothing. There was no sense of altitude, as they could neither see top nor bottom. Instead, they drifted in a directionless universe by themselves as the snow whirled around them. The only colors were white and grey and the only sensation was cold.

When they got to the top they saw to their astonishment that the snow wasn't falling out of heaven the way it does in a natural winter. It rose in a column out of a huge stone chimney the way ashes are expelled from a volcano. Then the wind caught the flakes and spread them over the world.

"Hello!" cried Nick, leaning over the opening, face into the blast.

"Hush! We're uninvited. It's best we come unannounced."

There was a precarious stairway cut around the inside of the crater, spiralling down into the heart of the mountain. Doubtless someone's grandmother used it for comings and goings, and perhaps it was also trod upon by monsters and snow elves, slithered over by ice snakes, and Tom could well imagine frost dragons following it as they drifted up from the bottom on their silvery wings.

But now it was empty. From below, if they listened carefully over the shrieking wind, the two companions could hear the sound of hammering, like a smith at a forge.

Which was exactly what it was.

When they had at last completed their descent, both of them ghastly pale from the cold and beyond all shivering, having braved the incredible fury of the upward current, they found themselves standing on a polished floor of ice as smooth and slippery as a mirror. Carefully sliding along the wall, they came to a doorway and entered a foundry, where a naked blue giant, twice as tall as mortal man and four times as massive, labored over a forge.

No heat came from his fire. The flickering blue flames were as rigid as the rest of the place. The giant would stoke them for a while, then go to his bellows, and they would burst up. Out of them he would draw with a pair of tongs what seemed to be a ball of pure Cold, an abstract thing made concrete: it was glassy with a trace of silver. An azure light flickered at its core. This ball he would place on his anvil and pound with a hammer until it shattered into millions of snowflakes, which the wind would suck out of the room and up the chimney.

He worked for several minutes, his back to the two humans, but then Nick scratched behind a numb ear and an icicle fell to the floor, shattering.

"Whozzat?" The giant whirled about, revealing a chest covered with white hairs and a face which sported an oversized blue nose. All his body was blue, like a corpse abandoned in a wintry field. His nose, however, was a brilliant, almost glowing sapphire. Even under such circumstances, and as fierce and unnatural as he looked, the nose was impressive.

"Whorryyyou?"

"Who are you?" asked Tom. "We asked first."

"N nooo." The giant wheezed, and his breath was as piercing as any blizzard.

"In that case you'll have to excuse us, since we are both lunatics and have trouble keeping track of such things. Your pardon, brave, noble, heroic, hardworking sir."

"Huhh?" The giant looked around, as if seeking advice. Then he scratched his shaggy head — dandruff fell like snowflakes or snowflakes like dandruff, one or the other — and at last comprehended the flattery. He stood up straight, chest out, shoulders back, gut sucked in, smiled, and said carefully, with great pride, "I am The Great Snog. I am far greater than The Lesser Snog, who isn't here."

"Where is he?" Nick interrupted. Tom scowled at him, but The Great Snog was non-plussed.

"Out running errands for his gggrandmother. I wish she werre hhhhere. I need someone to wwworkk the bbbellowss. Itt slows mmme downnn."

"We're just the ones," said Tom. "Being mad, we desire what sane men dread, so we'd like nothing more than the whole world covered with ice and snow."

"Yessss. . .ssso nice. . .quiet and cold and dark. Grandmother will like you. . . At least you're not hhhhere to ssteal my nose. There was a hhhero hhhhere once, but Grandmother warned me. Hhis name wasss Sigulf. . .or Siglop. . .something like that."

"He stole your nose?"

"Nnnnoo. We gggot him. Grandmother sssays if sssomebody stole my nose, my power to make cccold would be lostt. But we gottt him. There."

The two of them looked where a massive finger pointed, and beheld the hero in all his Teutonic glory, clad in horned helmet and elf-wrought byrnie, with magic sword in hand — and frozen in a block of ice and hung on the wall of the cave as a trophy.

"We'll have to meet your grandmother sometime," said Tom. "But now to work."

Nick looked at him askance, wondering just what the plan was.

The two of them labored at the bellows and the production of pure cold doubled, then, tripled, then quintupled as The Great Snog hammered away in a frenzy of enthusiasm, happy to have such willing assistants. The Lesser Snog was always so quarrelsome. He never appreciated good work. So The Great Snog was happy. Audiences were scarce in his trade. He wanted to show them what he could do.

As he worked, he sang a frigid tune. So cold it had gotten in the room by that point that his breath froze, dropping from his lips to the floor in a tinkle. As each piece shattered, a word was released, and the song drifted upward: "It's... snowing... it's blowing... the... world... in... darknesss... gggrow- inggg..."

The tune was rather like *It's raining/it's pouring/the old man is snoring/* etc., although the giant was badly off key.

After a while his efforts got the better of him, and he was heaving with exhaustion.

"Mussstt snnooozzze..."

"Yes," said Tom. "Take a nap. Don't worry. We'll take over for you."

The giant lay down, while Tom beat out the pure cold, and Nick operated the bellows. After a while The Great Snog was fast asleep.

The two of them stopped. The air cleared as only a slight residue of snowflakes went up the chimney.

"Now what?" Nick asked.

"Steal his nose, of course."

The Great Snog snored. There was a sucking sound as he inhaled, and then he spat out little globs of ice, which cracked as they hit the ground and released the other half of the snore.

"We'd best hurry," said Nick. "How do we get it off."

"Pull, I suppose."

"No, Tom, I think I have a better idea. Let's melt him."

"What? In all this cold? If you weren't mad, I'd say that was the silliest thing I'd ever heard."

"No, watch."

And as Tom watched he tore off a piece of his underclothing, which was still dry, and set it afire with flint and steel from his pocket. Tom tore off a piece of his garments and touched it to the flame. Both of them sneaked gingerly over to the sleeping Snog.

"Tom, when I hold him down, you grab the nose."

Both of them stood stealthily above their victim, then simultaneously dropped the burning cloths onto the giant's face. There was a burst of steam, and The Great Snog awoke with a roar. Both of them leapt onto him, Nick struggling to hold the cloths on him. The three of them rolled and tumbled. The cavern shook with their shouts.

The nose came off in Tom's hand, and the giant stopped moving. He leaned like an awkward statue in a half crouching, half kneeling position, clutching at his face, crushing Tom and Nick under either arm. Relieved, they wriggled free.

Tom held up the nose for Nick to see.

"Let's find Grandmother Grey," he said.

From the back of the foundry there was another set of stairs going down, down, down, into limitless darkness.

At the bottom of that was a door marked PRIVATE in glowing letters.

"This must be her chamber," said Tom. He blew on the doorknob and his warm, human breath must have melted any locks. The door swung inward silently.

It was indeed her chamber. There was a bed of downy snow, with icicles for posts and a headboard decorated with crystalline curlicues. An ice cat, looking like the masterwork of some genius glassblower, sat curled on the pillow. When Nick stroked it, the animal purred, and little clouds of snowflakes drifted out of its nostrils.

On the nightstand were two mirrors, one of ice, to reflect, and the other of darkness, through which one could look out over the world and see how the devastation was coming along.

In open jars were Grandmother Grey's cosmetics: blue-black lipstick, ashen grey face powder, and eyeshadow made from the blood of frozen corpses.

This room led to another door marked: POSITIVELY NO ONE ALLOWED, AND THAT MEANS YOU, SNOGS #1 and #2.

"Even more private," said Tom.

"Fortunately, neither of us is a Snog, greater or lesser."

They opened it. A shriek came from within.

"Who dares disturb me in my bath?"

This room contained a frozen pool as wide as a small lake, in the middle of which lay Grandmother Grey, held by the ice so that only her hands and face were above its surface. Her hair spread out in all directions a few inches down, held rigid by the ice, like the petals of a withered flower. A dim blue light emanated from the bottom of the pool and reflected off the domed ceiling, filling the room. She was wearing sunglasses.

The two walked out to her.

"Have you still got the box?" Tom whispered.

"Yes, here it is." Nick gave it to him. He opened it, slipped the nose inside, then closed it again.

"A curse on you both!" screamed Grandmother Grey. "You will be the very last to freeze and you'll feel the cold the longest."

"Ah, Grandmother, you recognize us. We've met your grandson, the one with the spectacular nose."

Tom opened the box and tilted it, so she could see what was inside.

"No! You can't!" Faster than the eye could see, she reached out with her left hand, and her face and her right hand disappeared, and her whole body flowed like smoke out the hole in the ice where her left wrist had been. Like a gaseous serpent she writhed and wriggled around Tom and the box. He trembled, but he didn't drop it.

Her hand was the only definitely shaped part of her left. This crawled spider-like into the box and the rest followed, settling over the nose until the mist was entirely within, and defined by the four square sides.

"Now!" yelled Nick.

"Yes, now," said Tom, snapping the lid closed.

And the winter witch let out a long, woeful "Eeeeeek!" but before she could move it was too late. Tom fingered the latch into place.

At that very moment the air temperature began to rise. The surface of the bath turned into ankle-deep slush. Tom and Nick left the place as quickly as they could. On the way out, Tom noticed that the ice mirror was dripping and the cat had drowned in the bedsheets. The Great Snog remained where he had stiffened, but the Nordic hero, whoever he was, was beginning to thaw out. It was a treacherous and slippery way up the stairs out of the mountain, but the way down the outside was easier because the mountain was shrinking even as they descended, and there was less far to go. Still Tom held onto the box tightly, lest he accidentally drop it, the lid spring open on contact with the earth, and this all start again.

"You realize," he said to Nick as he gave him the box, when the two of them stood in a muddy field as the sun set in a clear sky, "that you'll have to carry this box for the rest of your life, never once putting it down."

"But. . . but. . ." Nick sputtered. "I'd have to be *mad* to do that!"

"And, when you're dying, you'll have to find someone else to carry it."

Tom relieved him of it some of the time, of course, as long as they were together, and, since the world has not frozen solid since, they must have managed to find someone to continue after them. The thing must still be in circulation to this day.

BUT, TO RETURN to the more immediate:

The rest of that summer was not like any other. Leaves had fallen from the trees, crops were ruined, and many of the birds had died. But others returned, and some flowers bloomed. It was hard for a while after that, but people were thankful enough that the world was saved. Sober historians, of course, have left no record of the blizzard of the summer of 1538. It was too preposterous. Theologians said little about it either, finding no precedent in Scripture.

Tom and Nick sat by the side of the same road a month later, singing the same songs and dangling the same bells, when again they heard the tramp of iron-shod feet and the clank of arms.

"You there, Nicholas Block," barked the sheriff. "You have not proven yourself mad, so come with us."

"No, no, sir, by all that's holy, I dare not, for if I do, you'll take this box away and set it down, and the witch of winter will escape with her grandson's nose, and the snow will start again." He trembled and held onto the box desperately. And he told the entire story of his adventure, as it happened.

"Why," exclaimed the sheriff, "that's the most *absurd* thing I have ever heard! 'Sblood, fool, ye're out of yer bloody head!" ●

Author's note: Some of the verses quoted in this tale are taken from the anonymous Elizabethan lyrics, "Tom O'Bedlam's Song" and "The Lunatic Lover." The others were writ by me in a fit of madness.

Darrell Schweitzer

Notes of the Peculiarities of Fame Dept: I was sitting at an autograph table at Noreascon II without much to sign, since my Starblaze books weren't out yet. Stanley Schmidt beside me was doing fine. One person came up and had me sign the last three *Fantastics*. I signed a few program books. Then I had an inspiration. I put out a sign that said: "The Meaning of Life available here, 25¢." Then I started doing a lively business. In fact, I made about \$4.00 that weekend selling the Meaning of Life. Barry Longyear commented that it was the most brilliant racket he had ever seen. In fact, I have decided to extend this offer to the readers of *Amazing!* 25¢ and a self-addressed postcard to me (113 Deepdale Rd., Trafford, PA 19087) will get you the Meaning of Life. I cannot, however, be responsible for philosophical shallowness which might prevent some from achieving enlightenment, even at this point. No refunds. Also, this does not take anything

away from Somtow Sucharitkul's meaning of life. His and mine fit together, Oriental and Occidental, yin and yang, ding and dong, vanilla and tutti-frutti.

The meaning of life is always in flux, my children, like the Cosmos itself, and that's why this blurb doesn't agree with the last two... I am in a curious condition right now (October) because I have these books coming out and everybody knows it, but no one has read them, so I am famous without any reputation in some fan circles. As you see, it has affected my mind. I have just written a sequel to "Raving Lunacy" entitled "Continued Lunacy," (to appear in *Amazing*) which is not more of the same. It is much loonier. They are coming to take me away, haha... When I was a child I caught butterflies. Obviously those men in the white suits with the big nets are entomologists...

Practicing

Turn out the lights and practice a still lying.
Tie cold poles to your limbs and freeze all down to numb.
Stuff black iron bulbs against your sightless eyeballs.
Pack silence in your ears until there is no hum.
Pour dirt into your throat and smother
yourself until there is a weight like trees.
Reach up and grab a handful of cold soil—
This may be practice; it is not make-believe.

— David R. Bunch

Robert H. Brown

NO SMOKING

That's marvelous!" the visitor said, leaning back in his chair. "Simply fantastic."

"Yes," the Director said, "the program is really working, and the country is all the better for it. Unemployment is down, the streets are safer, television is improving, the population explosion is over . . . everything we've been trying to do for years. Of course, our methods were thought to be a bit unconstitutional at first, but, luckily, the Supreme Court saw the light."

"Who wouldn't have? The benefits far outweigh the costs."

"And don't forget that we did have precedents on our side. Take, for example, compulsory education."

"Yes, but that was child's play compared to your brilliant plan. Who would ever have thought of it? A federal law whereby all illiterates would be shot on sight. Great!"

"And remember, the Illiteracy Elimination Administration is the smoothest running in Washington. No illiterate bureaucrats here."

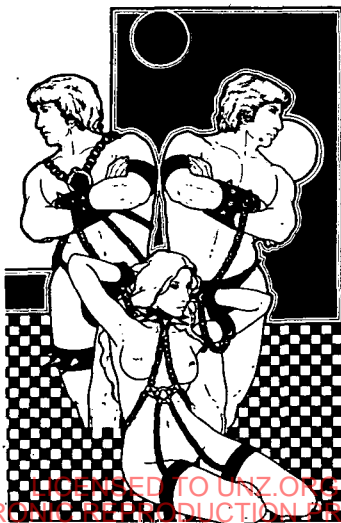
"Probably the only agency here that can make that claim," the visitor added.

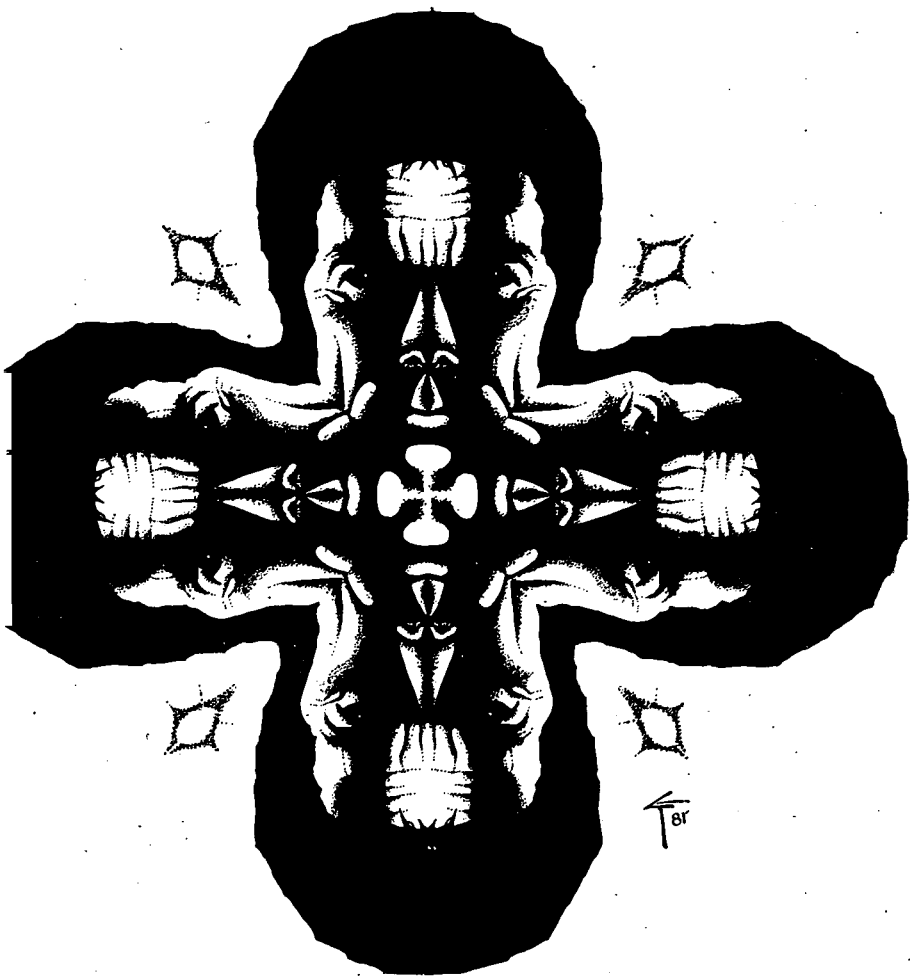
"Right. You see that sign?" the director asked as he pointed to the large, embellished sign on the wall over his desk on which *Read and write, or reach!*, the administration's motto, was written in golden gothic script.

"So?" the visitor asked, "Who's smoking?"

The director quietly drew his pistol.

"Oops," the visitor said. ●





At the center of the universe

Wayne Wightman

Finding It in outer space . . .

Panntel sneered. "Commander Saxxon," he said, his fists on his hips, "I'll do what I damned well want to do till we get planetside. Then if I don't do my job, you can put me on report." Panntel's bristling white hair glowed under the white cabin lights. He picked up the glass of blue Amphidrine and against orders drank it down, staring every moment into Saxxon's eyes.

Saxxon did not move. Nor did the others.

Orbeel had been giving the orbital sterilizer a last checking out — but she had stopped to watch the confrontation. Dorrlis sat at the console, half turned in the form-chair, his eyes also on Saxxon.

Panntel took the glass from his blue-stained lips and held it in front of his chest. Still staring at Saxxon, a faint smile turned up one corner of his mouth.

The glass of blue Amphidrine exploded up into Panntel's face. Saxxon had kicked upward, his foot shearing through the glass, into the bottom of Panntel's jaw. Panntel fell back a step, the blue mixing with red on his loose tunic. Saxxon hit him only once more, just below the sternum. Panntel teetered and fell over on his back. His head thumped once against the bulkhead and his open eyes stared straight up at the ceiling, seeing nothing. Saxxon straddled him, his open hand drawn back at his side, the fingers aimed at Panntel's throat.

"I should kill you now," Saxxon said. "I want you to give me an excuse, Panntel. I would like to be finished with you now, right now. Before we go planetside. Give me an excuse — tell me what you think of me."

Panntel's head feebly wobbled from side to side. He said nothing.

Commander Saxxon wheeled and stared at the man at the console. "Any questions, Dorrlis?"

"No sir."

"I understand Panntel is your brother. Aren't you planning on defending him?" Saxxon's voice was soft and breathy.

"No sir. You're the commander, sir. He's only my half brother."

"Orbeel." He turned to face the kneeling woman. Sweat glistened on her forehead, near her heavy black hair. "Anything you want to say?"

"No sir. Nothing."

Saxxon paused three heartbeats. "Is that thing checking out like it should?"

"Perfectly sir," she said.

"Good. I wouldn't want it to fry us before it's time."

"No sir."

"I'm invoking Confederation Ship Code 33," Saxxon announced to them. "There is to be no communication between crew members except in my presence. Stand up, Panntel."

Copyright© 1981 by Wayne Wightman

Illustrated by Gary Freeman

AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE 115

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man awkwardly got to his feet. Blood dripped from his chin and some of the Amphidrine had blue-stained the front of his white crewcut hair.

"Orbeel and Dorrlis — violation of Code 33 and you'll be sedated and confined. Panntel — can you understand me, Panntel?"

He nodded. He seemed to have some trouble breathing.

"Panntel, you violate one direct order of mine and I'll put you on the jump platform, bound for nowhere."

The crewman nodded again. Drops of blood made perfect round dots on the deck in front of his feet.

"Dorrlis, when will we achieve a parking orbit?"

"Twenty-two minutes, Commander."

"Thank you."

Saxxon went into the storage cabin and began breaking out the weapons. The next twenty-four hours would now be considerably worse than even he had expected.

SAXXON HAD both a reputation and a record. His reputation was one of being overjoyed when nothing went wrong — as for expecting anything to go right. . . well, he didn't even consider that to be a recognizable aspect of reality. It seemed to him that inanimate objects fell into open rebellion when he came near them. The universe for Saxxon was an unplanned exercise in perversity. As for people. . . The details of his record weren't as well-known as his reputation, but the sustained charges involved what was politely called "over-zealousness" in the service of the Third Confederation.

First he'd been in the Survey Corps — a washout followed his enlistment there more quickly than the night the day. Not enough action, he claimed. Transfer to the Insurrection Detail was what caused the biggest tangle of charge and counter-charge. Saxxon said certain members of the Detail were aligned with the enemy; part of the Detail crew claimed Saxxon was a greater danger to Confederation welfare than any of the half-baked revolutions they were sent out to suppress. It was never resolved to anyone's satisfaction.

It wasn't long before Saxxon ended up where he was now, in an Exploration Special Squad. When a regular exploration team or exploration rescue team got in trouble, an ESS went after them. The mortality rate was high, but there was always a long list of ESSers waiting to be sent out. Zealots and those with high aggression indices were always in surplus. The Confederation used them up at a good clip — but no one cared. The aggressive always looked for a place to blow out their hostility and the Confederation was always willing to help them find it.

Saxxon had lost four previous crews. He personally was luckier than he was brutal, but neither he nor his crews would ever have admitted it. And his fifth crew, now, was in a class by itself, specially constituted for rescue work on 3C-6474b.

Panntel and his half brother Dorrlis were accused of piracy while in the service of the Confederation. The murders couldn't be substantiated, but eighty-six of the Shrifar race had vanished in one of their raids. Like most cases of this sort, the accused were put in an ESS and the case was stalled. If the accused were ever killed in the line of duty, the charges would be dropped. Most charges were dropped.

As for Orbeel, she had depressurized a First Mate's suit while they were repairing a sloppy fuel line connection outside their ship. Some said he had assaulted her some time earlier. Some said Orbeel had popped her seals a long time ago after a well-meaning soul had mixed up her recreational drugs. She got a bad combination.

Saxxon watched them all very carefully. He made it a point never to be alone with the two brothers. There were so many ways for accidents to occur.

"PARKING ORBIT, sir," Dorrlis said. "We're locked in."

"Orbeel, send down the jump plate."

She nodded. A minute later, he felt a mushy jolt as the lander shot away to take the plate down to the surface.

"Sir," Dorrlis said, "I've located the Exploration ship and the two ESS ships. They're all silent."

Saxxon checked the positions on the trivid screen. The ships hung like gigantic dead ornaments against the stars. They were far enough away that incidental drift would present no danger.

A chirpsignal indicated the robot lander had set up the jump plate.

"Test it," he said to Orbeel.

She inserted a program disc into the console and a second later a rectangle glowed bright green:

PLATE OPERATIONAL

"Orbeel — you're first. Then Panntel, I'm next, and Dorrlis is last. Get your gear on. Weapons go down with me. You'll get them on the surface after we get the sterilizer targeters pinned on."

The crew listened silently, then obeyed like automatons, the very thing Saxxon knew they weren't. They obeyed only because their individual survival now depended on the efficiency of the group.

Panntel was ready first. He stood by the plate near Saxxon, waiting for the others.

"How much am I going to be able to depend on you, Panntel?"

The ESSer's chin had swollen and his eyes were puffed with repressed anger. "I have to depend on you, Commander, as much as you have to depend on me. But we'll probably neither of us get back. After three crews are lost there's no reason to expect us to come out of it." His puffed mouth turned up at one corner. "I'd just like to see you fry when the sterilizer hears you've checked out."

"If I could, I'd get you a ring-side seat."

"I'll bet."

Behind Panntel, Orbeel slapped out the wrinkles in her jumpsuit. "Ready," she said. In the ship's light her black hair was shining like it was oiled. "From the Exploration report, it sounds pretty nice down there." Her voice was six shades too cheerful. "My guess is some kind of predatory bird. What do you think we should expect, Commander?"

"I don't know. The planet's only life is vegetation, according to the report."

Dorrlis joined them. Most of his color was gone. His boyish face now looked its full twenty-eight years. Saxxon had to remind himself that Dorrlis was probably an accomplice in mass murder.

"Once before," Saxxon said, "on some piece of rock that's since been mined to death, it was 'nothing' that killed three crews. Nothing at all. Three crews in a row just got on each other's nerves. Can't imagine why they didn't like each other."

Panntel's mouth wrinkled up — he could have been smiling through his pain or getting ready to spit.

"Three self-destructs in a row, huh?" Dorrlis said breathily, looking at no one. "Wish to hell I was on Mike's Place instead of here."

"What's that?" Orbeel asked.

"Out of the way planet. Near tropical in most places." He just stared at the plate

while he talked. "I was there a couple of hours once. They told me to get off or they'd disperse me." Dorrlis was blinking rapidly.

"Then they can't be all bad," Saxxon said. "Get ready."

Pannetel glared at him.

"Come on," Dorrlis said. "Let's go. If I'm gonna die I don't want it to be of suspense."

Orbeel punched on the jump plate. "That's easy for you to say when I'm first." She pushed a loose strand of her black hair behind her ear and positioned her feet on the platform. Her muscular body looked stiff. She took a deep breath and with her heel she touched a stud on the plate and disappeared.

3C-6474B HAD eaten up on Exploration crew and two ESS's. So 3C-6474b went into the ESS jargon as a People Eater. It was smaller than Old Earth and a little over 250 kilometers from its F4 sun. A solid cloud-cover kept the surface temperature at a pleasant 29° C over the entire planet.

The Exploration crew had radioed up only two messages before they vanished. The first, from orbit: "Atypical proterozoic life. Preliminary atmospheric analysis: O — 32%, N — 56%, N₂O — 8%, etc. Everything looks healthy." The second entry, from the planet surface: "Beautiful. A perfect landscape. . . every leaf and drop of water. . . is perfect. Paradise."

The rest was silence. The tape was blank to the end.

The ESS's had left no records; they had been equipped for rescue, not recording.

When a third ESS is sent in, such as Saxxon's group, it means heavy business is afoot. They were given an orbiting sterilizer. Each member of the crew was given a targeting device that would be hooked into his skin. If the body died, the orbiter would eliminate all life within a kilometer of the dead crew member. It was necessary therefore that the crew keep well-spaced apart.

The sterilizer performed another function: if the crew were all killed, the last crew member's targeter would key up a highly efficient program in the sterilizer that would result in the chemical and radioactive poisoning of every living plant and animal on the surface of 3C-6474b.

Having the thing hanging overhead did not make them comfortable.

"I MADE IT," Orbeel's voice said from the console. "Jesus Christ. . ."

"What is it?" Saxxon said into the receiver.

"It's. . . not what. . . Jesus. You'd better get down here and take a look at paradise."

A minute later the four of them stood side by side, looking in wonder across what the Exploration crew had described as "beautiful. A perfect landscape."

"What the hell is this?" Pannetel said. "Are we in the right place?" He turned to Dorrlis.

"I fed in the location I was given," he said timorously. "Their ships were up there so this has to be the place."

Saxxon had seen a world like this only once before — a remote world in the 37th sector of the Cancer Quadrant — a world utterly covered with swamp. Over their heads, tree ferns rose and seemed about to topple from the weight of the slime that hung from the fronds. Before them lay hectares of black mud glistening in the crystal clear air. The thousands of tiny puddles reflected the white sky and looked like bottomless perforations in the sticky mud. The air was sweet and filled with the heavy odor of decay.

They jumped when a rotting gob of tree fern splatted in the mud nearby.

"Maybe the other crews stepped in the wrong place and . . ." Dorrlis mumbled. "Or something lives in the mud," Orbeel said. "Wish I was on Mike's Place now too."

Saxxon took up one of the solid matter lasers. "Let's see if we can shake loose anything," he said. "I'd hate to go for a walk in the mud if something lives down there."

He adjusted the SML to a low power and aimed it at the mud a dozen meters beyond them. The laser hummed. Mud flapped and steam hissed and billowed upward. Saxxon moved the beam of heat further away and as he increased the power, plowing a boiling swath two meters wide and three meters deep, a ton of steam boiled out of the ground and rose up through the gummy dripping fronds.

"God, is this an ugly place," Dorrlis said.

The steam cleared and Saxxon looked down the crusted furrow. There was nothing but mud.

They listened and watched the mud surface. Only the drops of condensing steam and the water trickling into the furrow disturbed the utter silence.

"Hopefully no mudfish," Orbeel said.

"Hook up the sterilizer locaters," Saxxon said quietly. They did so and he checked to see that it had been done. It was each person's guarantee that no other crew member would burn him — to get that close would be suicidal. Saxxon fastened his in full view of Panntel. He wanted him to know his own locater was operational.

Saxxon passed out the weapons: type Three solid matter lasers with janglers attached — the jangler twisted nerve impulses of anything it hit into a godawful tangle, incapacitating or killing any living organism. As the jangler interrupted the nervous flow, the SML3 flickered lightning-fast patterns of intricate design across the victim. Originally the SML3, the "smiler," as they'd come to be known, had been developed for mining. It would cleanly cut through a meter-thick wall of cataplast.

"Standard Fourth Group procedures," Saxxon said. They would kill first, identify later, and no explanations would ever be required. "We spread out and keep in constant touch with the four-count."

They separated from the jump plate and began slogging into the swamp in the same general direction at different angles. The top dozen centimeters of mud squished around their boots, but below that it was firmer. Walking was not easy, but there was, at least, no wading.

"This place is a gob of crap," Saxxon heard Panntel yell out through the forest of ferns. "I say we sterilize it now and go back to Mike's Place." His laughter echoed across the mudflats. "I volunteer for Emperor."

"Begin the four-count," Saxxon said. His throat mike spread the command.

Orbeel began. "One." Then Panntel: "Two." Dorrlis counted three, Saxxon four, and they began again . . . regular steady counting and hopefully no one missed a beat.

They spread out a kilometer and a half apart. If one of them took the big one, the sterilizer would hit the circle of heat — it would be hot for the adjacent members, but the extra half kilometer separation would keep them from being seriously injured. Soon, the counting became automatic and was done unconsciously.

Saxxon was glad to be alone. He didn't like the crew, nor did he trust them. He preferred his chances with the swamp.

Orbeel first broke the count. "I saw something. Something moved. Twenty meters away. I don't see it now. It's hiding behind a tree fern."

"Damn it," Saxxon shouted. "What was it?"

"Human, sir . . . kind of. Humanlike."

"The tree where it hid — cut the top off it, then keep slicing down on it till you flush it out. If it runs away, jangle it. If it looks twice at you, slice it. Resume the count."

Over the tops of the trees, Saxxon could see the smoke and steam rising, three kilometers away. The count went around three times. Orbeel's voice was low and tight.

"Well?" Saxxon asked.

"Nothing," she said. "He could have got away in the steam and noise when the tops fell. I didn't see anything."

There was nothing else to do but go on.

They went on.

The landscape did not change. Mud. Ferns. Stink. At the infrequent spat of a glob of rot dropping from a fern branch, Saxxon would spin around with the smiler, ready to fire.

He did not get accustomed to the smell. As he walked, the mud he churned up released fresh clouds of heavy stench. Several times it wafted over him and in trying to catch his breath, he faltered in the count.

"I see someone — definitely human," Panntel said. "He's running. I want to see if I can get him without the jangler."

"Go ahead," Saxxon said.

After a moment, he could hear the rasp of Panntel's heavy breathing. Between the low voices of Dorrlis and Orbeel, the communicator fastened to his shoulder spat out the sharp splats of Panntel's boots running through the muck.

"I see one!" Orbeel said. "To my right. I'm after him."

Her breathing synchronized and desynchronized with Panntel's.

Dorrlis and Saxxon counted quietly now, waiting for the next word from their partners.

"Running faster than I am. . . ." Panntel grunted through his breath.

"Use the jangler," Saxxon ordered.

The breathing changed, both Panntel's and Orbeel's.

"Score one." — from Panntel.

"Two," Orbeel's voice said.

"Mine's human all right," Panntel reported. "He's got a blood type tattoo under his arm — so he's one of the ESSers. He's dead too. God damn it. I wanted to take him alive. Filthy mess."

"Mine's the same. Mucked-up hair. Hardly looks human — but he is." A pause. "Blood tattoo, same as Panntel's."

"Let's get moving," Saxxon said. "Resume the count."

"Why?" It was Dorrlis' voice.

"What do you mean, *why*?"

Dorrlis spoke haltingly. "It seems kind of pointless."

"Pointless?" Panntel bellowed.

"We've just jangled two ESSers," Saxxon said. "They weren't supposed to be alive, so what the hell are you mumbling about? Let's get on with it."

"I'd prefer not to, sir."

"Do as you're told, Dorrlis, or I'll come over there and burn you myself."

"Were disturbing this place, sir. It's so . . . peaceful that. . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Dorrlis? Dorrlis!" Saxxon expected to see the sterilizer hit over where Dorrlis stood.

"Answer up, Dorrlis!" — Panntel's voice.

"Commander?" he finally said.

Panntel: "Dorrlis, what in hell's with you?"

"What do you want?" Saxxon said.

"Look up at the fronds, sir."

Saxxon looked up at them. They were green — black-looking against the bright colorless sky, they glistened with slime, they were ugly, and they stunk.

"I see them, Dorrlis. What about them?"

"I didn't see it till now, Commander, but they're . . . *arranged*. They aren't just randomly hanging up there, sir. The pattern is . . ."

Saxxon looked up again. The fronds tangled in some places, overlapped in others. Everywhere the white glare of the sky showed through — vast areas of it in places. But Saxxon saw no pattern.

"Dorrlis?"

No answer.

"Dorrlis — this is an order. Answer me." Again, in the silence, Saxxon expected to see tons of steam boil out of the swamp as the sterilizer calculated Dorrlis' death. But it didn't happen.

"Dorrlis, answer. Please respond."

Unexpectedly, his voice came back, a sliding laconic voice: "Sir, it's everywhere. It's in the trees . . . and in the mud . . . just a minute . . . it's in every . . . every puddle . . . It's—" He laughed briefly. "It's on my hands too." He paused. "Commander, it's in me."

It was his last transmission. They couldn't raise him.

"I'm going after him," Panntel announced.

"If he dies when you're in his radius . . ." Saxxon said, "I guess you know where we'll find you."

"Yeah, in the clouds. I'm going."

"Orbeel," Saxxon said, "stay where you are. I'm going to back up Panntel. We'll be circling through the eastern edge of your radius, so don't die in the next twenty minutes, all right?"

"If I do, you'll know it," she said. Saxxon imagined her standing in the midst of the ferns, her black hair heavy with moisture.

Saxxon slogged as fast as he could, leaving a trail of ragged foot-holes behind him. The wet, heavy air tasted sweet and his lungs breathed easily, but his thighs felt as though they'd been hammered.

"Dorrlis isn't here," Panntel's voice said.

Saxxon stopped in his tracks. Mud oozed up over his boots. "Which way does his trail lead?"

"West."

"That's back to the jump plate. We'll have to intercept him. If he decides to go back to the ship and leave us . . . Orbeel — I want you after him. Stop him before he gets to the plate. It must not be damaged in the process. Dorrlis is expendable. Orbeel?"

No response.

"Orbeel!"

"Holy Jesus." It was Panntel.

"What now?"

"Dorrlis deactivated his sterilizer locator. I've found it here. I thought maybe he'd been attacked — but the prints in the mud say otherwise. He did it himself . . . out of his mind."

"If he's suicidal, which this looks like," Saxxon said, "we have that much more

to worry about."

"Wait a minute . . . I see something here in the mud."

Saxxon tried again to raise Orbeel.

Nothing.

"Commander, Dorrlis dropped his smiler and I think — yes — I'm digging up his communicator now. I think I've got his belt spotted. He's dumped everything but his clothes and he's headed back to the jump plate."

"Panntel, I can't raise Orbeel. We'd better get back — fast."

Orbeel's last position was approximately between Saxxon and the plate. When he found her trail, he found just what Panntel had found of Dorrlis — her equipment half sunk into the mud. Apparently she now wore only her jumpsuit. But she didn't head back to the plate — here tracks rambled crookedly to the north.

Saxxon decided to let her go. It was imperative the plate not be damaged and that Dorrlis in his present condition — whatever it was — not get up to the ship.

In his slogging run, Saxxon had been watching the ground about three meters in front of him. For no particular reason, he raised his eyes. A face jerked out of sight behind a fern trunk. Saxxon slid to a halt, set the jangler on its lowest setting, and held the trigger back as he turned 360 degrees. The thing fell and splatted in the mud behind the tree. At Saxxon's side, behind a fern not two meters away, another creature dropped to his knees and then fell backwards, his head sinking halfway into the slime.

Saxxon bent over one then the other just long enough to verify that they were indeed human — most probably members of one of the missing crews. But he didn't examine them any further — he had to beat Dorrlis to the plate and if he wanted to be sure he ever got back up to the ship, he would also have to beat Panntel there. After doing in eighty-six of the Shrifar, leaving one commander on a swamp world wouldn't cause him enough guilt to blink twice.

Saxxon managed a grotesque kind of high-stepping slog-run through the mud. The smiler grew heavy as lead in his hand. Every ten minutes he had to stop and catch his breath, and each time he did this he cleared the area around him with the jangler. Twice, human bodies toppled from behind trees and sank into the mud. He did not examine them.

"Panntel," he said between heavy breaths. "Panntel, Orbeel. Is anyone there?"

"Panntel here."

"Have you seen Dorrlis yet?"

No answer.

"Panntel! Have you seen Dorrlis? Are you still on his trail?"

"Commander . . . I just found out what Dorrlis was talking about. This place . . ." His voice slowed and faded out.

"What is it? Panntel! Talk to me!"

"The . . . I don't think I'll be going back with you, sir."

"Panntel — are you injured? What's wrong?"

"The mud, sir. Goodbye . . . Commander . . ."

Saxxon begged and threatened, but he could get no further response from the man. He slogged on.

Something was eliminating his crew, one by one. The mud? he wondered. It looked like brownish-grey stringy mud. Just mud. But he couldn't stop to think about it — his one consideration had to be to get to the jump plate before any of the others. Otherwise they could leave him here.

Half an hour later, his lungs felt like they were starting to cave in. He cleared the area with the jangler — he was alone this time — and leaned back on a fern

trunk. He no longer smelled the stench of decay, and, the foulness gone, the air tasted sweet. He caught his breath easily, but everything beneath his skin ached and throbbed as though he'd been pounded with mallets.

Whatever had happened to the earlier crews was happening to his own. The possibility of it being some quick-acting disease crossed his mind. Or the atmosphere. The Exploration crew had done some kind of analysis on it, but the record they left was far from satisfactory: he would have the atmosphere rechecked when he got back. If he got back. He wondered if he would know when whatever happened *happened to him*. Perhaps he would just stop communicating — stop everything — just like the others.

Or maybe this thing was some kind of non-coporeal being that invaded the minds of the crewmen. Saxxon tried to remember Dorrli's last transmission. Something about "it" being everywhere — in the trees and in the mud. A casual glance at them told Saxxon that nothing had changed — it was the same tangled foliage, the same stinking mud he'd been wading through for hours.

And for what? he asked himself. So the Confederation could jump down a handful of mineral strippers and some colonists who had been thrown off some other world. That's why he'd been risking his life here, why he'd been trying to keep alive a little longer by running a ship so tight that the crew considered being with him as big a risk as being planetside.

He tilted his head back and rested it against the trunk of the fern. The fronds were black against the glare of the featureless white of the cloud cover. The branches wove a complex herringbone pattern with variations determined by their elevation on the trunks they branched out from. Above him, every three meters, he could see what at first appeared to be a ragged gap through which the sky glared — the raggedness was nearly always triangular in shape and every triangle changed in height and size, but all three factors varied in what had to be a predictable regularity.

The more he studied it, the more the irregular complexities resolved themselves into predictable inevitabilities. He suddenly realized that even if this fern forest covered the entire planet, on the other side of the world he could look up and see only different variations on the same pattern.

The SML3 on his right arm pulled heavily. He let the butt end drop at his feet. A splatter of mud and water splashed from the impact.

By the barrel he lifted the smiler a few centimeters and dropped it again. And once more. He couldn't believe what he saw. He stamped his foot in the mud and watched the muck splash outward. The globs of brown water arced out in a spray of parabolas that was absolutely not random in design. The drops fell in groups of two, three, and five, and the pattern, whether large or small, varied according to the moment's relationship to time and place — no pattern would ever repeat itself because each had a different *existence*, but the variations were all based on one complicated formula which he now recognized.

Saxxon looked away for a moment and his gaze drifted through the tree ferns and far into the grey swamp. He could hear only his breathing and the occasional plops of falling decay.

A wave of recognition hit him, buckling his knees. He dropped the smiler and landed on his butt in the mud. The trees — the fronds — his being there — the other crews — he saw into the rhythm of this segment of the planet's existence. The looping coils of coincidence drew them here and awakened them here. Recognition sheared away curtain after curtain of blindness. His life and the life of everyone he'd met fell into a brilliantly illuminated design of an intricacy that only

now, he realized, could he understand.

There was a pattern to it all, a design. But did it matter? He began to laugh at the answer he gave himself. He slapped his thigh and the mud flew. No, it didn't matter in the slightest. The design was there to be seen, to be made sense of, in the way a person always wants to make sense of his life, but once the sense was made . . .

He laughed at the uselessness of knowing the design of the fronds over his head, the design everywhere. When he laughed, he could discern the separate waves of sound hitting his eardrums.

Inevitable patterns, unavoidable designs were everywhere. And if there was a design, was there a designer?

The moment he'd asked the question he knew it was stupid. It was like looking at the forest and wondering where the trees were.

The laughter sounded deranged to his ears, but never did he feel saner. For the first time in his life, he felt *awake*.

Saxxon lifted himself to his feet, leaving the smiler where it lay. He was no longer interested in defending himself. Everything would be as it would be. Stepping away from the tree, he sensed that one direction would be much like another, so he trod away, infinitely amused by both the way he had diddled away his last fourteen years and by the triviality of the complex design he'd seen into — instead of inspiring great seriousness in him, his discovery struck him as would a consummately clever joke.

He walked on.

Something unusual lay at his feet. A disc, several centimeters thick. A platform. He stood on it to feel the firmness of its metal. In the middle of it, a little off-center, there was a stud which he accidentally depressed with his heel — though he knew now that there were no accidents. Underfoot he could feel the sliding of metal against metal and the click of the connection. Air and lightness filled his body. He saw himself disappear.

The ship's interior began to form before his eyes like a brilliant and irregular metal crystal. The console, the formchairs, the two ports, and the passageway to the storage room gathered and took on their multidimensional fullness. The heaviness of the metal and cataplast panels, the confinement, physically weighted him till he fell heavily into one of the chairs. It adjusted to his shape, closing up the space near his body.

The rhythm of his existence included this too, but the ship's regularity of design, its utter predictability and its stringently enforced sterility depressed him, his previous life depressed him, the orders he'd given for such trivial reasons depressed him. He sat there sagging in on himself, his eyelids drooping from the weight on his awakening. After a few moments he no longer had the strength to stave off the exhaustion, and his consciousness collapsed. He slept.

When the ship's light seeped through his opening eyelids, something in him had changed — whatever had affected him earlier had half worked out of his system. Saxxon stood up and vigorously massaged his eyebrows till the blood began to flow quickly through his eyelids, waking him up.

His first thoughts were of Orbeel, Panntel, and Dorrlis. But if he went back to the surface to bring them up to the ship, he could again lose all motivation. He presently had none too much of that anyway. He was absolutely convinced that what he'd seen on the surface of 3C-6474b was no hallucination; he had learned something: the patterns he'd seen there were not limited only to that place. He knew he would be able to see them on whatever world he next landed on.

To bring back the crew, he would have to first protect himself against whatever was altering his perception of what he thought was reality. The air? The mud?

Some undetected virus?

He pulled on a full-protection suit and jumped back to the surface, armed with a handsized low power jangler.

The three sets of tracks were not hard to follow.

ORBEEL SAT dazed in a formchair. Her black hair had fallen around her shoulders. It was wet and heavy across her discolored jumpsuit. Near her, Dorrlis sat with his eyes closed. His white-knuckled fists indicated that he did not sleep.

Only Panntel waited below to be jumped up. Saxxon activated the plate. Panntel's shape gathered within a vortex of light. The instant he appeared, he could be seen twisting the adjustment of a mud-caked smiler to maximum. It was pointed at Saxxon.

Dorrlis' eyes clicked open and he leaned forward. "Don't!" he hissed. "You'll puncture the ship! Like you did with the Shrifar."

Saxxon saw Orbeel very gently shaking her head no.

Panntel raised the weapon so that Saxxon looked straight down into the barrel. The Commander comforted himself with the thought that he would be sliced into chunks of charcoal before his brain could register the pain.

Panntel's face twisted, half smile, half grotesque sneer.

THE TWO OF them leaned on the wood railing as dusk settled into darkness around them. At their backs, the flames of oil lamps flickered inside their cabin.

"When did they say the harvest would be ready?" she asked.

"About a month," he said. "I still can't believe they just handed over the orchard and the cabin to us. I'm still operating on old assumptions, I guess."

She moved closer so her shoulder touched his.

"The birds are strange here," she said softly. "I've never heard such songs."

He nodded. Stars began to thicken in the sky. Down the path, at a friend's cabin, he could see lamplight through a window. He felt the warmth of being at home, though only a month had passed since their arrival.

"Do you know why Panntel didn't kill you?" she asked.

He shrugged. "My guess is that somewhere in his head he had the idea I wasn't a part of the design — and he was going to rectify that. Fortunately, when he saw me, faced me with that laser in his hands, he realized he was wrong."

"More old assumptions bite the dust," Orbeel said. She looked up at the sky. Somewhere in the orchard, a bird thrummed a mixolydian mode in its throat. "Do you think they're happy back there on 6474?" she asked after some silence.

Saxxon nodded. "The design is so strong there it pulls them into it. If they were here . . . they'd eventually resort to their old ways. To stealing."

"I can still see it out there now, in the orchard, in the lacing of the branches. The pattern, I mean. It's either a madness, or maybe the gift of total awareness. . . ."

Above them, unfamiliar stars spread like a scattering of pebbles thrown from a hand. But it was all there, still there. It spread around them through all the stars, the infinitely subtle and complex design that never repeated and never ceased.

Saxxon held her hand. "Look up," he said. "We are standing at the center of the universe." ●

Mitchell White: How do you write about the inexplicable?

Wayne Wightman (a desperate look on his face): It's awful. It's a terrible problem. The unexplained, the mysterious, the inexplicable is everywhere. Everyone's encountered it. But it's almost never written about because, according to the rules, fiction is not a mirror of reality, it is a distillation of reality, a refinement of it; fiction is on this earth because it makes sense out of reality — that's why stories have structure and order. But what order is there in the inexplicable? What in the name of fifteen million gods can you say about something that's going to remain mysterious forever?

MW: But you *have* written about it.

WW: And I may never do it again. Look, a story is like a puzzle in a box. You read it and when you get to the end of the story, the puzzle has been assembled and you see

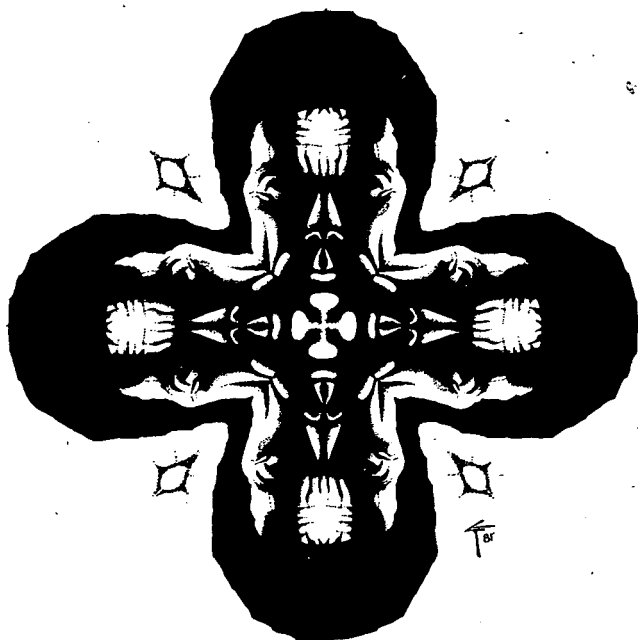
the pattern, the meaning, and the sense of the story. A story on this miserable subject can't, by definition, come together at the end and make any kind of satisfying pattern. It leaves the reader with a couple handfuls of puzzle pieces and a message that he's never going to get them together.

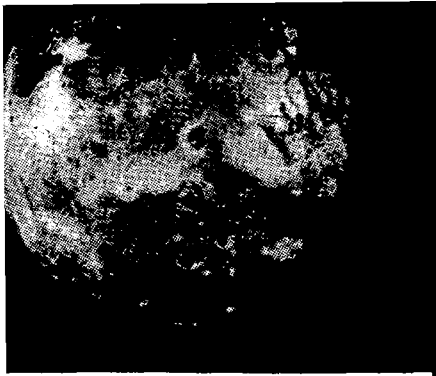
MW: But the idea of a perpetual enigma is an interesting one.

WW: It's fascinating. Imagine mankind running up against something — a situation or a thing or a concept — that no member of the species can understand. I'd be willing to write a report about it, but not a story.

MW: What do you think we would do if we came across something like that, something utterly enigmatic?

WW: If we couldn't use it, I think we'd probably eliminate it.





The Man who Loved Mars

Dave Stover

HE WAS BORN into an elite Boston family; his brother became president of Harvard, his sister won a Pulitzer Prize for her poetry. He spent nearly a decade in the Far East, acting at times as an envoy of the American government, and he was responsible for such (now long out-of-print) classics as *Occult Japan* and *The Soul of the Far East* upon his return to the United States.

But for his service to his country, for his voyages and his recollections of them, for these thoroughly respectable activities he is not remembered. And his brother and sister, once more widely-known than he, have also vanished from our memories.

The man does live on, though. He lives on because he liked to look at the night sky, and because he saw certain markings, certain strange features, on a certain planet.

He was Percival Lowell, the man who loved Mars, and 1980 marked the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth.

—And we in science fiction owe him a great deal...

Lowell abandoned his career in the diplomatic service in the 1890s, returning to America and indulging an interest in astronomy by building his own observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. That, of course, is a measure of the family's wealth: even in 1894 astronomical observatories could not be built for a few collected dimes and nickels.

The observatory was built on a 7000-foot high mesa near Flagstaff, and it was built with one interest in mind: the study of the planet Mars.

You see, Lowell was obsessed with one

burning question throughout most of his career in astronomy, the problem of the Martian canals. To explain his interest, let's digress a few moments—

About the same time Percival Lowell was making the rounds of the Mysterious East, an Italian, Giovanni Schiaparelli, was also exploring a strange new world — Mars.

Schiaparelli was one of the first men to map the red planet, and the very first to observe the notorious canals. Observing seemingly straight lines on the orangish disk of Mars, Schiaparelli called those markings *canali*, Italian for "channels." But the Italian was mistranslated, and it was reported that Schiaparelli had seen canals — artificial waterways.

The same year Lowell built his observatory in the Arizona desert, Schiaparelli retired from astronomy, for a good reason — he could no longer see. Lowell decided that he would take over the mission of mapping the canals, and that he did with a vengeance — over the next decade he saw hundreds of canals, crisscrossing Mars in an intricate network.

Well, confronted with these canals, an explanation was evidently needed for their origin. Lowell had one, and it was a romantic, exciting explanation indeed.

An ancient, advanced race of beings inhabited Mars, Lowell decided, but they were a doomed race, for their planet was dying. Mars was an old world, smaller than the earth, and most of its air and water had vanished into space. Its inhabitants, in a last, valiant effort to survive, had constructed an immense canal system to carry the planet's meagre water supplies from the polar ice caps to the Martian cities.

And a huge engineering task it was, as Lowell described it, for some of the canals he saw were thousands of miles long; and to be seen over forty million miles of interplanetary space, these canals had to be dozens of miles wide!

Critics soon pointed out the absurdity of canals that wide: Mars didn't have enough water to keep them filled, and think of the loss due to evaporation. . . . Lowell replied that the canals visible from earth were actually the belts of vegetation surrounding much smaller waterways.

Lowell's ideas were too far-fetched, it seemed for most professional astronomers, especially since many of them couldn't even catch a glimpse of the canals, even using instruments far larger than Lowell's telescopes. And Lowell didn't do much for his own cause: after finding hundreds of canals on Mars, he began to see them on Venus, and Mercury, and the satellites of Jupiter. . . .

But if the professionals didn't sympathize with Lowell, the public adopted his ideas with fervour. The turn of the century saw Lowell's popularizations of his ideas become bestsellers, and H.G. Wells produced the classic fictional treatment of the Lowellian Mars in his *The War of the Worlds*. And Lowell's ideas continued in circulation long after his death in 1916: soon after, Edgar Rice Burroughs published the first of the still-popular Barsoom books, *A Princess of Mars*. The tradition continued in the SF of the thirties and forties, and produced some memorable stories indeed. Raymond Gallun's "Old Faithful" — one of the first sympathetic characterizations of an extraterrestrial — and Ray Bradbury's classic *Martian Chronicles* are set in a Lowellian Mars, as are a number of Robert Heinlein novels: *Red Planet* (1949) and *Double Star* (1956), among others. All these stories come equipped with canals, a dying Martian race, and ancient Martian cities. Lowell's impact on science was — in the case of Martian canals — negligible; his influence on science fiction was immense.

ALAS, PERCIVAL Lowell was wrong — completely wrong — with regard to Mars and the Martians. Telescopic observation throughout this century has shown Mars to be an extremely arid, cold planet with a very thin atmosphere. Until the sixties it was thought that, though animal life might be

out of the question, Mars could support some lowly forms of plant life, something like earthly lichens. The first space probe to the planet, NASA's Mariner 4, dashed even these hopes, painting a bleak picture of a desolate world, with an atmosphere less than 1/100th as thick as earth's, heavily cratered, heartbreakingly barren. And in 1976 the two Viking spacecraft failed to find even microscopic life. How the mighty Martians had fallen in but three quarters of a century!

As for the scores of canals Lowell reported seeing — they were never anything more than a figment of his imagination. There are craters on Mars, and river valleys that have been dry a billion years, and a Great Rift Valley that spans half the planet. . . . but there are no canals. Optical illusions, perhaps, brought on by eyestrain and imagination. Too bad!

In the early years of the twentieth century Lowell turned his attention from Mars to the very edge of the solar system and the search for a ninth planet, a search that was to dominate the remaining years of his life.

Seven so-called "planets" were known to the ancients, seven objects which moved in the sky as opposed to the stationary stars: the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The acceptance of the Copernican theory led to a redefinition of the term "planet": it came to mean a body revolving around the Sun, and earth was added to the list while the Sun and Moon were dropped. In 1781 William Herschel found the seventh planet, far beyond Saturn, and named it Uranus. Irregularities in Uranus's orbit sent astronomers searching for an eighth planet, which was found in 1843 and named Neptune.

But as the nineteenth century wore on, it became apparent that (1) Neptune did not account for all of the perturbing influence on Uranus, and (2) Neptune itself was wandering off course, thus (3) somewhere out there a ninth planet orbited the sun. . . .

It was that world that Lowell resolved to find.

Having tired of Mars, perhaps, and probably upset over the harsh reception other astronomers had given his ideas, he began a search for the elusive Planet X.

Working out calculations based on the discrepancies in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, Lowell determined that the ninth planet should be about three to five billion

miles from the sun and have a decidedly tilted and elliptical orbit.

At this time Lowell gained a rival in planet-hunting, a fellow Bostonian, William Pickering. The paths of the two had crossed before, during the canal controversy, Pickering denying the existence of the canals, Lowell defending his observations.

Lowell's long, lonely search at Flagstaff continued well into the second decade of the new century; he examined thousands of photographic plates and millions of stars in that period of time, looking for the world that had to be out there. The work took a heavy toll on him; he died of a stroke in November, 1916, and was buried near one of the telescopes where he had spent so much of his life, watching the night sky.

Pickering continued the search, but met with no success either.

NOT UNTIL 1930 did the breakthrough finally come, and it came at Lowell's Flagstaff Observatory, for though the man might be dust, his dream — and his money — lived on.

Clyde Tombaugh, a young man in his twenties, resumed the search in 1929. Technical advances made since Lowell's death enabled Tombaugh to search for the new planet much more quickly and easily than Lowell had been able to, and in February of 1930, while examining two photographic plates — one taken several days after the other — of a section of the constellation Gemini, Tombaugh found that in the interval between the two plates, one star had changed its position.

But stars don't move over a few days time.

After making sure the discovery wasn't a comet or an asteroid, the announcement was made: Planet X had been found.

The solar system's ninth world was named Pluto, after the god of the underworld in Roman mythology, an appropriate enough name for a planet situated on the edge of the interstellar blackness.

And appropriate for another reason, too.

After all, the first two letters of "Pluto" are "P" and "L"; Lowell's initials. And the symbol for the planet, a bold representation of the two letters intertwined, makes it even plainer.

Fourteen years after Lowell's death, the planet he had searched so long and hard for was found; and he achieved some small measure of immortality in its naming.

And with the discovery of Pluto, Lowell's career was officially over.

I'm looking at a picture of him as I write this: Lowell, in his observatory, dressed in dark suit and tie, peering into the eyepiece of one of his telescopes, a white-haired old gentleman with a moustache.

What's his legacy?

More than some obsolete theories and a few out-of-print books on the Orient. More than a major astronomical observatory. More, even, than the discovery of the solar system's ninth planet.

Upon his foundation a generation of writers built a literature of new and exciting ideas. In part, at least, we have Percival Lowell to thank for Wells' cold and calculating intelligences, for ERB's fabulous planet of Barsoom, for Bradbury's sensitive, poetic tales of the crystal cities and beautiful canals. These writers built on Lowell's concepts and descriptions and transcended those ideas and theories. No, the "Lowellian Mars" does not exist. It never did. It has been consigned to the scientific scrap-heap of obsolescent thought, obsolete interpretations.

But a generation of writers took Lowell's Mars, and upon it constructed a world more exciting, more imaginative, and in a way more real than the actual planet.

Lowell's Mars is no more and never was — but in a sense it exists, in the pages of the books and stories that have become classics of our genre.

We in science fiction owe one Percival Lowell a considerable debt, for a considerable number of hours of entertainment.

His legacy? — A generation of dreams.

Percival Lowell, 125 years old and not forgotten. The original man who loved Mars...

A native of Tillsonburg, Ontario, Dave Stover is a student, writer and collector of science fiction literature. Favorite authors, Asimov and Clarke. He has previously appeared on the pages of Fantastic (April, 1980) with a short-short entitled, "Creator of Tomorrow".

Impossible Numbers • Steve Aaronson

DID YOU EVER feel that you had lost your grip on reality for a moment — that everything, even your own body, was only imaginary?

Some physicists feel that way all the time. In fact, they recently discovered that everything in the universe is imaginary, at least part of the time.

As you might expect, Albert Einstein started it. In 1905 his theory of relativity merged the three dimensions of time (from past to future) into a unified spacetime with four dimensions. By themselves, space and time were different for different observers. But together, spacetime was the same for everyone.

The only trouble was in the mathematics. You can use a yardstick to measure the three space dimensions, but you need a clock to measure the time dimension. Can a yardstick be turned into a clock?

One of Einstein's mathematics teachers had once called him a "lazy dog" who "never bothered about mathematics at all." In 1907, the same teacher, Hermann Minkowski, helped Einstein solve the difficult problem of applying the same mathematical treatment to all four spacetime dimensions. Minkowski did it by using an old mathematical trick: imaginary numbers.

Imaginary numbers contain the square root of minus one. However, *minus one has no square root!* In our system of mathematics, a plus times a plus is a plus, and a minus times a minus is also a plus. The square root of plus one is one. But what can you multiply by itself to get *minus one*? As far back as the sixteenth century, the great mathematician Leonard Euler wrote, "All such expressions as the square root of *minus one*, the square root of *minus two*, etc. are impossible or imaginary numbers, since they represent roots of negative quantities, and of such numbers we may truly assert that they are neither nothing, nor greater than nothing, nor less than nothing, which necessarily constitutes them imaginary or impossible."

But mathematicians are obstinate, and Minkowski's trick — of expressing the time dimension as an imaginary number so it could be treated the same as the three space dimensions — helped Einstein's theory become so successful that even today, after 75 years of challenges, relativity 130

remains by far the best explanation of events on the large scale of planets, stars, and galaxies.

An even more successful theory, called "quantum chromodynamics," dominates physics on the scale of the very, very small. Although this theory makes no *certain* predictions, it gives incredibly precise probabilities about the states of particles at certain points in time and space. In the theory, a material particle such as an electron is treated like a field with two components. The startling coincidence is that while one of the components can be designated by a real (ordinary) number, the other component must be expressed as a number which contains the square root of minus one.

General relativity and quantum chromodynamics have almost nothing in common — except the impossible numbers, which are crucial to both theories. Physicists can combine the two theories to view a "matter field" in four-dimensional spacetime. When looked at in this way, the imaginary part of the matter field is always at right angles to its real part. Therefore whenever one is at maximum, the other is at minimum. The only way to determine whether the field is real or imaginary would be to disentangle the two components. But this is impossible, because of the "uncertainty principle" which forbids such precise knowledge of quantum states. So there can never be a way of telling whether a certain bit of matter, at a certain time, is real or imaginary.

Does this mean that we might suddenly disappear into some imaginary parallel universe? What's more likely is that physics is ahead of mathematics when it comes to describing the real world. After all, for our best physical theories to make sense, they must use impossible numbers. ●

Steve Aaronson is a science writer whose articles on astronomy and physics have appeared in a variety of magazines, from New Scientist to Playboy. He feels that in the far future our century will be remembered mainly as the one in which the study of cosmology led to a new view of man's place in the physical world.

COMING UP IN AMAZING

New Stories by: Roger Zelazny, Ron Goulart, Barry N. Malzberg, Bill Pronzini, Richard Lupoff, George R.R. Martin, Lisa Tuttle, Felix Gotschalk, David R. Bunch, Marvin Kaye, Parke Godwin, Tom Easton, Stephen Goldin, Grant Carrington, Hank Stine, Robert Adams, Jack Wodhams, Wayne Wightman, Timothy Zahn, Darrell Schweitzer, Paul Dellinger, James Patrick Kelly, Ron Montana, Michael Kube McDowell, John Steakley, Janet Fox and many, many exciting new writers.

Articles by: Robert Silverberg (continuing his "Opinion" column from *Galileo*), Tom Staicar (book reviews), J. Ray Dettling (Futures Fantastic) and many more.

Hall of Fame Stories by: Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison, Robert Sheckley, Theodore Sturgeon, David R. Bunch, Reginald Bretnor, Bertram Chandler, and many more.

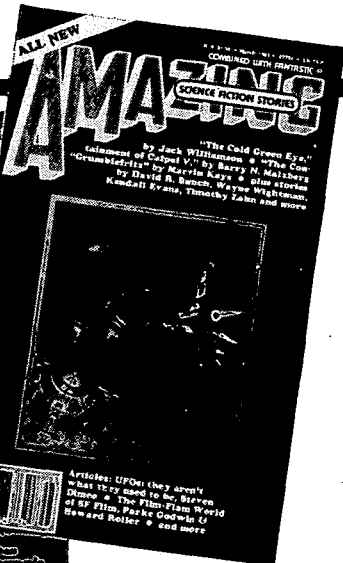
Interviews with: Gene Wolfe, Bob Shaw, Hal Clement, C.L. Grant, Bertram Chandler, Algis Budrys, Barry B. Longyear, Lloyd Biggle and many more.

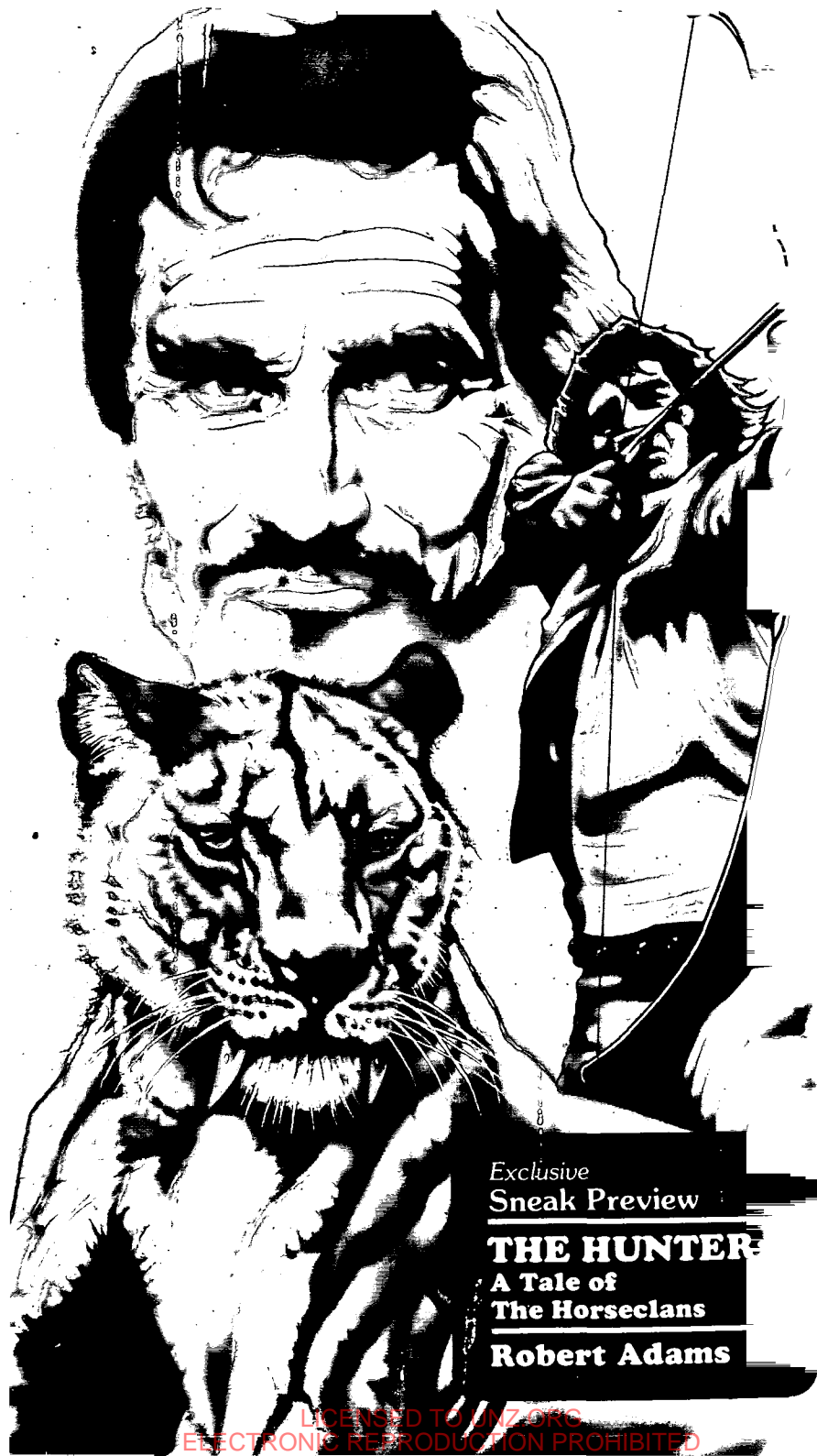
AMAZING STORIES

Available bi-monthly on
your newsstand or
subscribe • one year \$9
two @ \$16, three @ \$25

P.O. Box 642,
Scottsdale, AZ 85252

Canada & Mexico add \$2 per year
elsewhere add \$15 per year





Exclusive
Sneak Preview

THE HUNTER

**A Tale of
The Horseclans**

Robert Adams